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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Reliance to invest $300B in US' 1st oil refinery in 50 yrs

WASHINGTON/NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries will partner in building the first new oil refinery in the United States in nearly 50 years, US President Donald Trump announced, calling it the "biggest in US history".

The refinery will be built at the Port of Brownsville in Brownsville, Texas, and is expected to run entirely on US shale oil, according to project developer America First Refining (AFR).

Reliance has signed a 20-year agreement to purchase fuels produced at the refinery, with groundbreaking scheduled for the second quarter of 2026.

Trump, writing on his social media platform Truth Social, described the project as "a historic $300 billion deal" and said Reliance would partner in the venture.

AFR did not name the company but said it had received a nine-figure investment from a global supermajor at a ten-figure valuation. Reliance did not immediately comment.

> **US decided to grant New Delhi a temporary waiver to buy Russian oil because our allies in India have been good actors and have previously stopped buying sanctioned Russian oil**
>
> —White House

If completed, the refinery would be the first major new refining project in the United States since the Garyville, Louisiana, facility built by Marathon Petroleum came online in 1977.

Industry experts estimate the project could cost about $4–5 billion, though neither Trump nor AFR disclosed full financial details or a completion timeline.

The refinery would mark Reliance's first refining project in the United States. The company operates the world's largest refining complex at Jamnagar in Gujarat, processing about 1.24 million barrels of crude a day.

In recent months, India's energy trade has been shaped by US pressure to curb purchases of Russian crude, including tariffs of up to 50 per cent on Indian goods that were later eased to 18 per cent in February.

Indian refiners cut Russian imports last year, pushing Reliance towards costlier Gulf crude. Reliance shares rose about 7 per cent. *—PTI*

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NCERT trims Class 9 English syllabus, adds Sudha chapter

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

Texts from Indian authors such as Tamil poet Subramania Bharati, Rajya Sabha MP Sudha Murty, Naga writer Temsula Ao, Rabindranath Tagore and Assamese novelist Mitra Phukan have found a place in the new English textbook by NCERT for class 9.

In the previous textbooks — taught in schools between 2006-07 to 2025-26 academic sessions — 15 of the 29 texts were written by international authors.

According to officials, the number of textbooks for the subject has been reduced from two to one and the number of texts from 29 to 16, including as many texts from Indian authors as international authors.

The new Class 9 English textbook called "Kaveri" opens with a story taken from a 2004 book, "How I Taught My Grandmother to Read and Other Stories" by Rajya Sabha MP and author Sudha Murty.

The book, prepared as per the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023, will replace earlier textbooks "Beehive" and "Moments."

The new Class 9 textbook containing "elements of Indian. *—PTI*

All nations must condemn Israel, US: Iran to India

Iran has urged India to condemn what it called acts of aggression by Israel and the United States against Tehran, saying all nations have a responsibility to oppose violations of the UN Charter. Delhi has not publicly denounced the attacks since 28 February.

Amid fears of disruption to India's energy supplies from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, Tehran also warned that insecurity in the Persian Gulf shipping lanes could worsen.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held a "detailed" call with Iranian counterpart Seyed Abbas Araghchi on Wednesday, focusing on the Strait of Hormuz shipping crisis, which Tehran blamed on the United States. *—PTI*

LPG panic grips B'luru as gas agencies see long queues

Commercial cylinders go out of stock; Menus in PGs cut

BENGALURU, 11 MARCH

Panic enquiries for domestic LPG cylinders have risen at several gas agencies in Bengaluru over the past few days amid concerns about supply disruptions linked to the widening West Asia conflict. Dealers, however, said on Wednesday that domestic stocks remain adequate for now.

However, the scene on the ground appeared starkly different. Long queues were seen at gas agencies for domestic LPG cylinders. At a centre in Bengaluru's Jayamahal Extension, people began gathering from around 9.30 am, and the crowd had swelled significantly by 12.30 pm.

The panic was so intense that a Bengaluru resident told Salar News they had to buy an LPG cylinder on the black market for Rs 2,000, even though the normal price is Rs 915.

Several other LPG dealers reported a surge in enquiries and advance bookings as households try to secure refills in advance. Ravi Gowda of Balaji Stores, a private cylinder agency, said his outlet had received numerous queries over the past two days. "We have sufficient stock at present and receive daily supplies. Cylinders can also be delivered urgently if required," he said.

While domestic supplies remain stable, there is an acute shortage of commercial LPG cylinders, forcing hotels and restaurants across the city to operate under strain. An LPG dealer said commercial cylinders are currently unavailable, leaving eateries worried about potential closures. Hotel and restaurant associations have warned that establishments may be forced to suspend operations once their existing stock runs out.The shortage has also affected paying guest (PG) accommodations. Arun Kumar, president of the PG Association, said the disruption has forced kitchens to revise their menus to conserve fuel. The association's core committee has directed PG owners to adopt a "crisis menu", reducing high-consumption cooking and introducing items that require little or no fire, such as salads and other raw food options.

He assured residents that meals would continue to be provided. "There will be no 'mess out' system; food will remain available in PGs," Kumar said, while urging the government to intervene immediately to prevent a complete kitchen shutdown. Similar concerns are being reported across the country. Restaurants in Delhi and Hyderabad have warned of operational disruptions due to irregular commercial LPG supply, while long queues were reported outside gas agencies in parts of West Bengal. In Indore, street vendors have switched to electric cooking, and sales of induction cooktops have surged. *—PTI*

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People queue at a gas agency for domestic LPG cylinders in the Jayamahal Extension area of Bengaluru on Wednesday *—MOHAMMED ASAD*

NO NEED TO PANIC BUY LPG, ALL UNDER CONTROL: PM

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

Amid LPG shortage triggered by the West Asia war , Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday appealed to people to not panic and assured public interest will be protected.

He said this while launching NDA campagin in Tamil Nadu's Tiruchirappalli.

He said India will overcom e the energy crisis situation like Covid-19.

The government said India has sufficient LPG stocks to meet household cooking gas demand despite supply disruptions.

Ministry of Petroleum said there was no need for panic booking of cylinders and the normal delivery cycle of about two-and-a-half days was being maintained. To offset disruptions from the blockage of the Strait of Hormuz, India has secured additional crude oil from alternative suppliers.

The ministry added that two LNG cargoes are also en route. About 75 per cent of India's crude now arrives through routes other than the Strait of Hormuz, compared with 55 per cent earlier. *—PTI*

Oppn's no trust motion against Birla defeated

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

The Lok Sabha on Wednesday rejected a resolution seeking the removal of Speaker Om Birla, with the motion defeated by a voice vote amid protests by the Opposition.

Jagdambika Pal, who was in the chair during the proceedings, announced the defeat of the no-confidence motion as Opposition members raised slogans demanding an apology from Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

Pal repeatedly urged Opposition MPs to take their seats so the motion could be put to vote. However, as protests continued, he proceeded with the voice vote, after which the resolution was declared defeated. The House was then adjourned for the day.

Birla was not present in the House during the entire debate.

A total of 118 Opposition MPs had signed the motion accusing the Speaker of "partisan behaviour".

During the debate, Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi said he had been stopped from speaking in the Lok Sabha on several occasions and asserted that the House rep-resented the entire country, not any single party.

Responding to the discussion, Shah criticised the Opposition for bringing the motion and said Parliament would function according to its rules, not the rules of any political party.

Shah cited Rahul Gandhi's parliamentary attendance to counter claims of bias against the Speaker. He said Gandhi's attendance in the 17th Lok Sabha was 51 per cent compared with the House average of 66 per cent, and 52 per cent in the 16th Lok Sabha against an average of 80 per cent.

He also noted that the Congress, with 52 members, was allotted 157 hours and 55 minutes for debate in the 17th Lok Sabha, while the BJP, with 303 MPs, received 349 hours and eight minutes. Shah said Gandhi's foreign travel was a major reason for his lower attendance during Parliament sessions. *—PTI*

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IN LANDMARK VERDICT

SC allows euthanasia for man in coma for 13 years

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Wednesday allowed the withdrawal of artificial life support for a 32-year-old man who has been in a coma for more than 13 years, while urging the government to consider comprehensive legislation on passive euthanasia.

In its first order on the issue, a bench of Justices JB Pardiwala and KV Viswanathan directed AIIMS-Delhi to implement a tailored plan to withdraw life support while ensuring the patient's dignity and freedom from pain.

Passive euthanasia refers to allowing a patient to die by withholding or withdrawing life-sustaining treatment.

The patient, Harish Rana from Ghaziabad, was a BTech student at Panjab University when he suffered severe head injuries after falling from the fourth floor of his paying guest accommodation in 2013. He has remained in a coma ever since.

In its 338-page judgment, the court said the two legal requirements for withdrawing treatment had been met. Clinically assisted nutrition and hydration through percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy tubes constituted medical treatment, and medical boards had concluded that continuing it was no longer in Rana's best interests.

Doctors said the treatment merely prolonged biological existence with no prospect of recovery.

The court also noted that both the primary and secondary medical boards had recommended withdrawal of life support, meaning judicial intervention was not strictly necessary.

The bench praised Rana's parents and siblings for their unwavering care over the years, noting they had stood by him despite immense hardship. The order follows the court's 2018 Common Cause ruling recognising passive euthanasia and the right to die with dignity as part of Article 21. The guidelines, which allow the withdrawal of life support through advance medical directives, were further simplified by a constitution bench in 2023.

—PTI

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MEA said it had taken note of reports about the attack on the Thai-flagged cargo vessel as Mayuree Nareethe *—SCREENGRAB*

Ship enroute to India attacked

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

India on Wednesday condemned attacks on commercial shipping in West Asia after a Thai-flagged cargo vessel bound for Gujarat's Kandla port was struck by an projectile in the Strait of Hormuz, triggering a fire and a rescue operation.

The Ministry of External Affairs said it had taken note of reports about the attack on the vessel, identified as Mayuree Naree, which was sailing towards India when the incident occurred.

"India deplores the fact that commercial shipping is being made a target of military attacks in the ongoing conflict in West Asia," the government said, warning that such incidents were becoming increasingly dangerous.

The statement added that targeting civilian ships and crew members and impeding freedom of navigation must be avoided.

Maritime security sources said the bulk carrier was hit by a projectile while passing through the Strait of Hormuz, about 11 nautical miles off Oman's coast. The vessel, owned by shipping firm Precious Shipping, caught fire but the blaze was later brought under control. Thailand confirmed that 20 of the 23 crew members were evacuated by the Omani navy, while three remained on board. India said 28 Indian vessels with 778 seafarers are currently in the Persian Gulf. Of these, 24 vessels with 677 seafarers are west of the Strait of Hormuz and four with 101 crew on the eastern side. *—Agecnies*

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-12

Two Indians killed in West Asia: MEA

Two Indians were killed, and one is missing, when merchant vessels came under attack during the ongoing war in West Asia, an External Affairs Ministry spokesperson said on Wednesday. India, he said, remains committed to the welfare of citizens residing in the Gulf region. *—PTI*

India buys 30M barrels of oil from Russia

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

India has snapped up about 30 million barrels of Russian crude after the US granted a temporary waiver allowing purchases of oil loaded on ships before 5 March, as the war involving Iran disrupts global energy supplies.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday discussed the West Asia crisis with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas.

The buying spree comes amid uncertainty over the conflict's duration and its impact on key shipping routes. Analysts estimate that around 138 million barrels of Russian crude are currently at sea.

Washington's waiver is aimed at easing pressure on energy markets after the conflict between the United States, Israel and Iran effectively shut the Strait of Hormuz,

With tankers unable to pass through the strait, India has scrambled to replace supplies it usually sources from producers such as Saudi Arabia and Iraq to keep its economy running.

Refiners including Indian Oil Corporation and Reliance Industries have purchased Russian cargoes in the spot market, according to data intelligence firm Kpler. State-run Indian Oil bought roughly 10 million barrels, while Reliance acquired at least as much.

Unlike earlier discounted deals, buyers are now paying premiums of $2 to $8 a barrel above the Brent benchmark. *—Salar News*

'7,110 km rural roads to be rebuilt in 1.5 years'

BENGALURU, 11 MARCH

Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge on Wednesday said the State government aims to complete the rebuilding of 7,110 km of rural roads at a cost of Rs 5,180 crore under the 'Pragathi Patha' scheme within the next 1.5 years. Replying to a question raised by Congress MLA KM Shivalinge Gowda during Question Hour in the Assembly, Kharge said delays occurred after the Asian Development Bank (ADB) raised objections to 293 roads proposed by the State. "Their objections are that these roads come under eco-sensitive zones," he said. Despite this, detailed project reports (DPRs) have been prepared for 999 roads and 573 are ready for tenders. Rs 3,242 crore is funded by the ADB while the State is funding Rs 1,443 crore, he said. *–PTI*

21 flights cancelled at KIA amid airspace curbs

BENGALURU, 11 MARCH

A total of 21 flights were cancelled at Kempegowda International Airport on Wednesday due to airspace restrictions affecting services to several West Asian destinations, BIIAL said. In a statement, Bangalore International Airport Limited (BIAL), which manages the airport, said that due to airspace restrictions on 11 March 2026, as many as 11 arrival flights and 10 departure flights were cancelled. The BIAL added that the cancellations primarily affected flights operating on key international sectors including Abu Dhabi, Riyadh, Jeddah, Dammam, Dubai and Doha, which witnessed disruptions due to the airspace curbs. *–PTI*

Sighting of leopard on MM Hills road triggers panic

MYSURU, 11 MARCH

There was panic among devotees after a leopard was sighted on the route to the Male Mahadeshwara temple in Hanur taluk of Chamarajanagar district on Wednesday. The leopard was sighted near Ane Tale dimba curve retaining wall along MM Hills on Wednesday morning. The devotees who were passing through the stretch on their vehicles captured videos of leopard from their mobile cameras and circulated them on social media. The public appealed to the State Forest Department to initiate measures to tranquilize and cage the animal ahead of the Ugadi Jathra. A leopard had attacked a devotee from Mandya in February. *–SALAR NEWS*

Four held for Rs 1.79 lakh worth of MDMA in DK

MANGALURU, 11 MARCH

In a major crackdown on drug trafficking, Vitla police in Karnataka's Dakshina Kannada district have arrested four people and seized MDMA worth about Rs 1.79 lakh during a raid, officials said on Wednesday. Vitla Police Station conducted the raid, acting on a tip-off that drugs were being sold from a rented house in Indira Nagar at Neralakatte in Bantwal taluk. The four accused allegedly possessed 17.97 grams of MDMA, a synthetic narcotic substance commonly referred to as Ecstasy. Police also recovered a knife from the house. *–PTI*

IFTAR FOR ALL

An inter-faith iftar gathering was held at Ulsoor Gurudwara Sahib in Bengaluru, on Wednesday ***PHOTO: Salar***

Food Minister: Skip a meal on Mondays

Muniyappa says don't stress over LPG

BENGALURU, 11 MARCH

Minister for Food and Civil Supplies KH Muniyappa on Wednesday said that there was no need for any concern over LPG supplies while urging people to be prudent with their gas usage.

"Give up one meal every Monday," he told press in Bengaluru.

Later, addressing the Assembly, he said the supply of commercial gas will be prioritised for essential services like hospitals and student hostels. "Hotels, those operating marriages and convention halls should cooperate in these difficult times, because we will have to look at the consumers first."

A private LPG gas bunk for vehicle was closed due to scarcity, near Nayandahalli in Bengaluru, on Wednesday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

"Along with our secretary and commissioner, I held a meeting with oil companies -- BPCL, HPCL, Indian Oil and GAIL. There is no issue with domestic gas," Muniyappa said.

"They (companies) have said that their own production is to the tune of 20-30 per cent, and 70 per cent comes from other countries. Due to Iran-Israel war about ten vessels carrying oil to India are not allowed move. Despite the situation, the companies will supply one cylinder to a family in 25 days. As per law one cylinder of 14 kg can be used by a family of 4-5 people for one to one-and-half month," he said.

He said priority is being given to domestic supplies. "I request people not to use gas excessively. They should ensure minimum use and not store or book additional cylinders unnecessarily."

'DON'T BLACKMAIL'

Muniyappa pointed out that the Essential Commodities Act was in place, and warned of action against black marketing or attempts to book multiple cylinders.

Earlier in the day, he had told reporters that the government would take action if required.

"Distributors cannot deny one cylinder a month to the consumers," he had warned. *—Agencies*

PGs advised to serve 2 meals/day

Temples stock wooden logs for prasada

BENGALURU, 11 MARCH

The Bengaluru PG Owners Welfare Association has issued an advisory urging paying guest (PG) accommodations to serve two meals a day during weekdays (Monday-Friday) amid the LPG shortage in the country. Three meals can be served as usual on weekends, it said.

It has also urged facilities to avoid serving dosa, poori, chapati and similar dishes that need more gas to cook and suggested sharing cooking between nearby PGs.

This will likely affect lakhs of people who reside in PGs across the City.

MIDDAY NOT HIT YET

The LPG crisis has not affected the midday meal programme for government school students yet, though there was a meeting in the Education Department to find ways to tackle if crisis deepens, sources said.

Schools will be closing for summer holidays in one or one-and-a-half weeks.

TEMPLES SHIFT TO WOOD

Temples have started preparations to stock wooden logs fearing that the LPG shortage could hamper the 'Prasada'.

"We have LPG cylinder stock that can last for a week but if this scarcity continues then there will be a problem in serving prasada," said Akhila Karnataka Hindu Temple Archakas Federation President MS Venkatachalaiah.

DISRUPTION IN MYSURU

Several small hotels in Mysuru closed following the shortage of commercial LPG cylinders. More hotels will suspend operations starting Thursday.

Mysuru Hotel Owners' Association President C Narayana Gowda said supply was almost zero and the situtation needs to improve soon. *—Salar News*

The Banashankari temple in Bengaluru used to serve unlimited free prasada three time a day. But on Wednesday, amid the LPG crisis, it began serving limited food once in a day ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Uproar in Assembly over LPGs

BENGALURU, 11 MARCH

The House witnessed commotion over the issue, with heated exchanges between the ruling and Opposition benches.

Raising the issue during the Zero Hour, Congress MLA Ranganath attributed the shortage of commercial LPG cylinders to Modi government's "weak foreign policy".

His remarks triggered protests by Opposition BJP members, who accused him of "politicising" the issue.

Minister Priyank Kharge claimed that public concern has grown after the Central government changed its stance in Parliament several times on the country's energy reserves. Kharge's comments, which referred to PM Modi's ties with US President Donald Trump and Israel PM Benjamin Netanyahu, enraged the BJP members.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah intervened, asking, "Who has to supply gas? It is the Centre."

The BJP legislators tried to counter by pointing to the alleged failures of the State government.

There was a sharp exchange between the CM and LoP R Ashoka, who accused the CM of "irresponsible behaviour and politicising" the issue by supporting the shutdown by hotels. Siddaramaiah denied the allegation, saying, "I did not instigate them for a shutdown." *—Agencies*

A man carries a gas cylinder on a cycle in Bengaluru on Wednesday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

BJP didn't start the war: BYV slams Cong for 'politicising' LPG

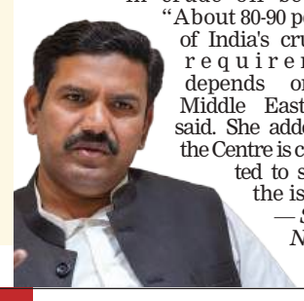
BENGALURU, 11 MARCH

State BJP President BY Vijayendra on Wednesday slammed the Congress for "indulging in cheap politicking" to score "political brownie points" on the issue of LPG.

"Let me remind the Congress that the Gulf War was not triggered either by India or by BJP or even by (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi," he told press outside Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Wednesday.

"The topless Congress is also shameless. It is so unscrupulous that it takes advantage of a grave national and international crisis to further its political ends. It is because of this cheap politicking the Grand Old Party has been rejected by the people for the three consecutive terms," Vijayendra said in Bengaluru.

The BJP state President asserted that Modi shas been making the best out of a bad situation by trying to regulate the LPG production and distribution by giving priority to household. Meanwhile, Union Minister of State Shobha Karandlaje noted that India is not self-reliant in crude oil because.



"About 80-90 per cent of India's crude oil requirement depends on the Middle East," she said. She added that the Centre is committed to solving the issue. *—Salar News*

Man held for hoarding over 4,000 litres of diesel

MANGALURU, 11 MARCH

Police have seized more than 4,000 litres of diesel that was allegedly illegally stored by a man anticipating a rise in fuel prices due to the Israel–Iran conflict.

The raid was conducted on Tuesday night at Mudalthiyar in Kaniyooru village of Beltangady taluk at the shed near the residence of Jagadish, 35, where police found a large quantity of diesel stored in drums and cans.

Officials said a total of 4,175 litres of diesel was recovered from 20 drums of 200-litre capacity each and five cans of about 35-litre capacity.

The seized diesel is estimated to be worth around Rs 3.5 lakh.

The accused had hoarded the fuel anticipating a price rise triggered by the West Asia conflict, police said.

Police said Jagadish had stored the fuel without obtaining the required licence.

During questioning, he told investigators that he had purchased the diesel from a friend about a week ago and stored it for commercial purposes. *—Salar News*

Quantum comp installed at IIIT-Dharwad, Raichur

BENGALURU, 11 MARCH

The Karnataka government on Wednesday announced the installation of QpiAI Indus, a 25-qubit quantum computing system, at the Quantum Computing Center of Excellence at the Indian Institute of Information Technology (IIIT), Dharwad and IIIT-Raichur.

The installation will be QpiAI's second deployment in Karnataka, expanding access to quantum computing capabilities for academia and industry in India, it said.

The initiative, under the Local Economy Acceleration Programme (LEAP), aligns with the State's efforts to build next-generation technology infrastructure under the Karnataka Quantum Roadmap, a statement said.

"The QpiAI Indus system will be leveraged for educational use, supporting curriculum development, hands-on student training, and faculty-led research as well as commercial workloads, enabling enterprises and innovators to experiment with and apply quantum computing to real-world problems," it said. *—PTI*

GOVT MULLS POLICY FOR DATA CENTRES OVER ENV IMPACTS

BENGALURU, 11 MARCH

Karnataka IT/BT Minister Priyank Kharge on Wednesday said the State government is considering a "sustainable data centre policy" amid concerns over environmental costs associated with water and energy consumption.

Responding to a question by Doddaballapur BJP MLA Dheeraj Muniraj during the Question Hour in the Assembly, he said, "We have 32 private data centres functioning in the state. We already have a data centre policy, which is under review."

Calling the data centres as 'necessary evil', he said they are needed for AI, machine learning and emerging technologies.

The Minister said the government's focus is shifting beyond Bengaluru, to coastal areas like Mangaluru.

Pointing out that hyperscale data centres will not be suitable for Bengaluru due to absence of a port and water constraints, he said, "...So our focus is on edge, small, medium and large data centers, rather than hyperscale that requires above 40 megawatt power."Earlier, Muniraj urged the government to set up data centre parks in his Doddaballapur constituency. *—PTI*

TO BOOST GROWTH

State mulls AI framework for MSMEs

BENGALURU, 11 MARCH

The Karnataka government is considering integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital transformation guidelines into its upcoming MSME policy to help local manufacturers prepare for future industrial challenges.

Rohini Sindhuri, Secretary of Department of MSME, Sugar and Textiles, on Wednesday said this after inaugurating a state-level stakeholder consultation workshop here, aimed at gathering industry inputs for formulating a comprehensive MSME policy.

Speaking at the event, Sindhuri highlighted that Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises account for nearly 97 per cent of the total industrial units in Karnataka and remain one of the largest generators of employment in the state.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

- With Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises account for nearly 97 per cent of the total industrial units in Karnataka, the new policy aims to place technology at its core, allowing MSMEs to adapt

Recognising the sector's importance, the government has initiated the process of drafting a dedicated policy to strengthen and modernise the MSME ecosystem, she said.

"As the first step, we have organised this State-level stakeholder consultation workshop. In the coming weeks, similar regional-level consultations will be conducted across districts to ensure broader participation and industry feedback," she said.

According to an official statement, the proposed policy will place technology and innovation at its core, enabling MSMEs to adapt to rapidly evolving global markets.

"As part of this approach, the government is exploring the introduction of specific AI and digital adoption frameworks for MSMEs, aimed at enhancing productivity, competitiveness and technological readiness," Sindhuri said.

She said the new policy is intended to further strengthen MSMEs, which form the backbone of Karnataka's industrial economy.

She also invited entrepreneurs and industry associations to actively contribute suggestions to help shape a forward-looking and inclusive policy. *—PTI*

SPARSH Hospitals introduces vaccination programme

In view of strengthening preventive and integrated healthcare care ecosystem, SPARSH Group of Hospitals today announced the launch of a comprehensive Life-Course Vaccination (LCV) Programme, making it one of the first structured vaccination initiative covering individuals from childhood to elderly adulthood.

The programme was officially launched by Dr Sharan Shivaraj Patil, Chairman & Chief Orthopaedic Surgeon, SPARSH Group of Hospitals, Jasdeep Singh, Group CEO, SPARSH Group of Hospitals; Dr Ranjan Shetty, Group Medical Director and Lead Consultant – Cardiologist, SPARSH Group of Hospitals.

The programme will be rolled out in phases, beginning with the flagship Infantry Road hospital in Bengaluru, followed by expansion across other SPARSH hospital centres in the city.

The initiative is supported by Zydus Lifesciences Ltd. The company will provide educational resources and capacity-building support to complement the in-house scientific expertise, led by Dr John Paul - Consultant Infectious Diseases at SPARSH Hospitals.

The initiative aims to promote immunisation by encouraging adults to use vaccines such as HPV (for cervical cancer prevention), shingles (herpes zoster), pneumococcal vaccines (for pneumonia and invasive infections). *Advertorial

DDMK allots 4 seats to MDMK for TN assembly elections

CHENNAI, 11 MARCH

The ruling DMK on Wednesday allotted four seats to its ally, MDMK, for the upcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly polls. Following talks held at the party headquarters here, it was decided that the MDMK would contest three seats under the DMK's Rising Sun symbol and the fourth under its own symbol, the party said in a statement on Wednesday. The state assembly election is likely to be held in April. —*PTI*

VHP backs anti-conversion bill in Chh'garh

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) on Wednesday welcomed the Chhattisgarh government's decision to approve an anti-conversion law and also supported a move to bar non-Hindus from entering temples managed by the Shri Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee. The Vishnu Deo Sai-led cabinet on Tuesday approved the draft of the Chhattisgarh Freedom of Religion Bill 2026 to prevent religious conversion through force, inducement, fraudulent means or misrepresentation. The decision was taken during a cabinet meeting at the premises of the legislative assembly, where the budget session is currently underway. VHP spokesperson Vinod Bansal expressed hope the bill will punish the perpetrators of the crime. —*PTI*

T'gana Speaker against BRS MLAs' disqualification

HYDERABAD, 11 MARCH

Telangana Legislative Assembly Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar on Wednesday dismissed the petition filed by BRS seeking the disqualification of two MLAs Danam Nagender and Kadiam Srihari. Prasad Kumar told PTI that the petitions seeking the disqualification of the two MLAs have been dismissed. BRS had filed petitions against Nagender and Srihari and eight other MLAs, alleging that they had defected to the ruling Congress after winning the election on a BRS ticket in 2023. Along with BRS, BJP MLA A Maheshwar Reddy also filed a petition for Nagender's disqualification. The Speaker had earlier dismissed the disqualification petitions filed against eight BRS MLAs. —*PTI*

Kerosene-bottles hurled at Karti's office

SIVAGANGA, 11 MARCH

Unidentified men hurled kerosene-filled bottles at the office of Congress MP Karti Chidambaram in Karaikudi on Wednesday and nobody was injured in the episode, police said. An intensive probe has been launched following the Molotov cocktail attack on the office of Karti, former Union Home Minister P Chidambaram's son. The office, located in Subramaniyapuram, serves both Karti, the Sivaganga MP, and his father. According to police sources, unidentified assailants hurled two kerosene-filled bottles at the premises. While one bottle exploded upon hitting the wall, the other failed to ignite. No injuries were reported as the office was closed. —*PTI*

Speaker neutral custodian, LS can't run on whims: Shah

Slams Oppn for questioning Birla's integrity

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Wednesday that the Lok Sabha speaker serves as a neutral custodian, representing both the ruling party and the opposition, and asserted that the House will be run by its own rules and not by the rules of a party, as he slammed the no-confidence resolution brought against Om Birla.

Responding to a discussion in the Lok Sabha on the resolution moved by the opposition for the removal of Birla as the speaker, Shah said it is not an ordinary occurrence as after nearly four decades, such a motion has been brought against the speaker.

He said it was unfortunate for Parliamentary politics that some opposition parties were questioning the integrity of the speaker.

Shah said the BJP has been in opposition for the longest period of time, but the party has never brought a no-confidence motion against the speaker.

"According to the established history of this House, its proceedings are conducted on the basis of mutual trust. The speaker serves as a neutral custodian, representing both the ruling party and the opposition. It is unfortunate for parliamentary politics that a resolution for the removal of the speaker has come," he said. Shah said the opposition raised questions on Birla's integrity and contended that it was akin to questioning the country's democratic processes. "We can speak of our rights, but no one can violate the rules of the House. We may not agree with the speaker's ruling, but it is binding and cannot be doubted. When the BJP was in the opposition, it never brought a no-confidence motion against the speaker," he said. The home minister said that after nearly four decades, a no-confidence motion has once again been brought against the Lok Sabha Speaker.

"This is a regrettable event for both Parliamentary politics and the House. Because the speaker does not belong to any party, the speaker belongs to the House. The House will be run by its rules, not by the rules of a party," he said. —*PTI*

Union Home Minister Amit Shah speaks in the LS during the second part of Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Wednesday —*PTI*

Not allowed to speak, House not of one party: RaGa

'Can't speak on Epstein, compromised PM'

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday charged that he was stopped from speaking in the Lok Sabha on multiple occasions on important matters like the issue of Jeffrey Epstein, Prime Minister Narendra Modi being compromised and former Chief of Army Naravane but was never allowed to speak.

Interjecting in a debate in Lok Sabha on the resolution to remove Om Birla as speaker, Gandhi alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi "has been compromised" and everybody knows the result of that.

In a heated exchange with BJP's Ravi Shankar Prasad, who cited parliamentary procedures to say that the leader of opposition should measure his words carefully, especially on issues of national security, Gandhi said that his name was being raised during the debate multiple times and "vile things" were being said about him.

"Every time we get up to speak, we are stopped. The last time I spoke, I raised fundamental questions about the compromises made by our prime minister. Multiple times, I have been stopped from speaking. Just a few days ago, for the first time in India's history, the leader of opposition was not allowed to speak during a debate," Gandhi said.

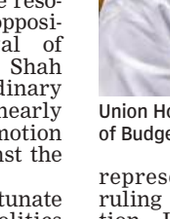
"I raised the issue of Mr (M M) Naravane, I raised the issue of Epstein, I raised the issue of Adani, and I was silenced. These issues are fundamental to the people of India," he said.

Separately, Congress Deputy leader in Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi on Wednesday said the government has created a constitutional vacuum by failing to elect a deputy speaker of Lok Sabha. He said neutrality cannot be reduced to a procedural formality and justice must not only be done, but also be seen to be done.

Speaking during the debate several opposition MPs including RJD's Abhay Kumar Sinha, Vijay Kumar Hansdak of the JMM and Bajrang Manohar Sonwane of the NCP (SP) claimed that they did not get the protection they should from the chair and disruption of their speech by treasury benches had become the norm. —*PTI/ANI*

LoP Rahul Gandhi speaks in the Lok Sabha during the second part of Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Wednesday —*PTI*

Didn't popularise fake claim at AI Summit, says govt



The government did not attempt to popularise a fake claim by an exhibitor at the AI Impact Summit 2026 and took prompt action against the concerned institution, the Lok Sabha was informed on Wednesday.

Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting **L Murugan** said responsibility for the nature of exhibits and claims made rested with the exhibitors at the India AI Impact Expo.

Responding to a query on whether innovation claims were verified before display, he said the government is working with global partners, industry, academia and states to promote responsible AI use.

India hosted the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi from 16–21 February. —*PTI*

Govt rules out labelling calories in processed food

There is no proposal before the Ministry of Women and Child Development to design, in coordination with the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, a "front-of-pack labelling" awareness campaign to identify empty calories in ultra-processed snacks, the Rajya Sabha was informed on Wednesday.

Over 93,000 posts vacant in CAPFs: Govt

More than 93,000 posts are lying vacant in the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and Assam Rifles, the government informed the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday. Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai stated the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) has the highest number of vacancies.

Census to include houses headed by transgenders

The upcoming Census will collect data on sex of head of household--Male, Female and Transgender, the Rajya Sabha was informed on Wednesday. Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai, in a written response, said Census 2027 will be conducted in two phases. The questions for the first phase, which covers

TV ads barred from showing 'miraculous' items

All advertisements telecast on private satellite TV channels are required to adhere to the Advertising Code and no advertisement shall contain references likely to lead the public to infer that the product has some miraculous property or quality, the Lok Sabha was informed on Wednesday.

End LDF-UDF cycle in Keralam: Modi

KOCHI, 11 MARCH

Launching a sharp attack on Congress and its top leader, Rahul Gandhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday, accused the Opposition party of "playing politics" over the West Asia crisis and said the LoP was unaware of the country's development.

Addressing a massive NDA rally in poll-bound Keralam, he also accused the ruling LDF of corruption. Kerala must end its pattern of alternating between CPI-M-headed LDF and Congress-led UDF governments for the state's progress, he said.

All efforts were on to ensure the welfare of Indians stuck in the war-affected West Asia, he said and urged people to not to fall for "rumours" by the Congress and the Left."

Attacking Gandhi, Modi claimed that the Congress "Yuvaraj" (prince) doesn't know about the development happening in the country as he was unaware that the youth and various companies in India, including in Keralam, were into drone manufacturing.

At the same time, he claimed that it was "sad" that even in such global crises, Congress is "playing politics" and making remarks that can worsen the situation and put people in trouble, so that they can ultimately blame him.

Additionally, Modi inaugurated projects worth around Rs 11,000 crore in the state.

Keralam Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and other ministers stayed away from Modi's official event, amidst a raging political row over the exclusion of the state's PWD Minister PA Mohammed Riyas from the event.

Though no reason was cited for Vijayan skipping the high-profile event, his cabinet colleagues pointed out personal inconvenience. —*PTI*

PM Narendra Modi receives a momento after inaugurating development projects on Wednesday —*PTI*

CPI(M) opens Kerala NH-66 before Modi

The ruling CPI(M) in Kerala on Wednesday inaugurated one of the completed stretches of NH-66, hours ahead of its dedication to the nation by PM Narendra Modi, to protest the exclusion of state PWD minister PA Mohammed Riyas from the PM's event. Riyas held a roadshow on one of the completed stretches of the National Highway-66 that was scheduled to be inaugurated by the PM. The Thalappady-Chengala stretch of NH 66 was inaugurated by CPI(M) MLA CH Kunhambu. The roadshow by Riyas was held on the Vengalam-Ramanattukara stretch of the Kozhikode bypass. —*PTI*

'CEC can only be removed by Parl'

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

The Opposition on Wednesday sought signatures from MPs for a notice to move a motion for the removal of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, alleging "partisan and discriminatory conduct in office", among other charges, sources said.

The move comes as the Chief Election Commissioner can only be removed by Parliament, through a process similar to that for removing Supreme Court or High Court judges.

This will be the first time that a notice will be submitted to remove a CEC.

The Opposition has often accused him of siding with the ruling BJP, disenfranchising genu-ine voters and helping BJP in "vote chori" (stealing votes).

The law states that a CEC cannot be removed from his office "except in like manner and on the like grounds as a Judge of the Supreme Court".

Meanwhile, seven charges are listed against the CEC in the notice and they range from "partisan and discriminatory conduct in office" to "deliberate obstruction of investigation of electoral fraud" and "mass disenfranchisement" among others.

Around 120 MPs have so far signed the notice to be submitted in the Lok Sabha and around 60 MPs have signed the notice to be submitted in the Upper House, the sources added.

According to rules, at least 100 MPs must sign a notice seeking the removal of the CEC in the Lok Sabha and 50 in Rajya Sabha.—*PTI*

RaGa is radicalised Islamist: BJP on cow urine remark

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

The BJP on Wednesday accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of echoing the language of "radicalised Islamists" who mock Hindus with 'cow mutra' jibes, after his remarks at a recent event.

BJP IT department head Amit Malviya criticised Gandhi in a post on X and shared a video of the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha speaking about political discourse in India.

In the clip, Gandhi says politics should focus on issues related to data and innovation rather than debates over "what we should eat and drink" or "whether cow urine is good for you".

Malviya said such jibes were often used by radicalised Islamists to mock Hindu beliefs. "One would not expect the Leader of the Opposition to echo the same language. Yet Rahul Gandhi seems determined to leave no doubt about where he stands," he wrote.

"What is truly tragic is that such rhetoric is dressed up as 'plain speaking' and passed off as ideological intellectualism," Malviya added.

In the video, Gandhi argues that India's political discourse should instead focus on how data is used, who has access to it and at what cost. —*PTI*

- Amit Malviya said such jibes were often used by radicalised Islamists to mock Hindu beliefs. One would not expect the Leader of the Opposition to echo the same language, he said

BIDDING ADIEU

Spent 'golden days' of life serving TN: Outgoing Guv

CHENNAI/ KOLKATA/ NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

Outgoing Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi who on Wednesday left for Kolkata to take charge in West Bengal, after serving the southern state for over four years described the days spent in the state as the 'Golden Days' of his life.

"In the flow of life, though the time has come for me to part from you, there is no doubt that these days spent with you are the Golden Days of my life," he said in his message.

"Names, memories and ideas flood my mind like a treasure trove - Great poet Mahakavi Bharathiyar, Arutprakasa Vallalar, Kaniyan Pungundranar, U Ve Swaminatha Iyer, and so many more. Over these 54 months, I lived and rejoiced through you and through these great souls. I immersed myself in noble principles and was deeply embraced by your love", he said.

Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi with state Chief Minister MK Stalin during a meeting, at Lok Bhavan, Chennai —*PTI*

Recalling that he was blessed with many opportunities to directly understand the various dimensions of the Tamil language and its people, the greatest quality that charmed him was the tireless hard work and joy that people find in it.

Lok Bhavan sources said the swearing-in ceremony of Arlekar as the Governor of Tamil Nadu, is scheduled to take place on March 12.

Meanwhile, in Kolkata former governor C V Ananda Bose on Wednesday described West Bengal as his "second home", and said his journey in the state was "far from over" as he would continue to remain associated with it.

In New Delhi, Taranjit Singh Sandhu a 1988-batch Indian Foreign Service officer was sworn in as the 23rd Lieutenant Governor of Delhi in a ceremony held at Lok Niwas on Wednesday. His predecessor, Vinai Kumar Saxena, has been appointed as the Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh. —*PTI*

— PTI

2 lichen moth species discovered in Himalayas

KOLKATA, 11 MARCH

Scientists from the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) have discovered two new species of lichen moths in the eastern Himalayan region. The newly identified species -- Caulocera hollowayi S Singh, N Singh & Bhattacharya, 2026 and Asura buxa Bhattacharya, S Singh & N Singh, 2026 -- have been described by an Indian research team and documented in the international taxonomic journal 'Zootaxa' on March 2, a ZSI spokesperson said on Wednesday. "These discoveries are vital for expanding knowledge about India's moth diversity. Research on groups like Lepidoptera helps scientists understand ecosystem functioning, especially in biodiversity hotspots such as the Himalayas," ZSI Director Dhriti Banerjee. The discovery of the insects is an important contribution to documenting India's moth biodiversity, the scientists said.—*PTI*

2 held in Assam for 'links' with radical groups

BARPETA, 11 MARCH

Two persons have been arrested from Assam's Barpeta district for their alleged links with fundamentalist groups, police said on Wednesday. The special task force (STF) carried out an operation on Tuesday night in the Sorbhog police station area and arrested the two accused, a senior officer said. "We have nabbed two jihadis from Barpeta last night. Their interrogation is going on, and we will share details later," a police official said. A Barpeta district official said the operation was carried out in association with the local police. In December, 11 people were arrested in Assam and Tripura for their alleged links with Bangladesh-based fundamentalist groups that were aiming to destabilise the Northeastern region,—*PTI*

UP temple ousts priest over viral meat-eating photo

KANPUR, 11 MARCH

A priest, who was mobbed after a photograph of him purportedly eating non-vegetarian food went viral, has been expelled from duties at the temple by his father, the 'mahant', while his whereabouts are unknown, officials said on Tuesday. Santosh Giri, the chief priest of the Baba Shri Bhuteshwar Dham Temple in Keshavpuram, said the person in the viral photograph is his son Prashant Giri alias Golu Pandit. "As soon as I came to know that he had eaten non-vegetarian food, I expelled him from service at the temple," Santosh sai. He alleged that a group of people accompanying a religious procession assaulted his son at the temple and said he could not stay here," he said. —*PTI*

'82% rural homes covered under Jal Jeevan Mission'

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday said that a whopping 82 per cent of rural households now have tap water connections, against 17 per cent in 2019 when the Jal Jeevan Mission was launched. Addressing the Jal Mahotsav programme, the President said water is not merely a basic facility in India but is deeply connected to the country's culture, traditions, livelihoods and community life. Congratulating Union Jal Shakti Minister C R Patil and his entire team for this extraordinary success, she noted that platforms such as the Sujalam Bharat App, real-time dashboards and systems to support decision support are ensuring transparent monitoring and effective planning in water governance.—*PTI*

Eateries improvise with induction, firewood

The government has prioritised providing domestic LPG cylinders over commercial ones

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

From induction cooktops and microwaves to firewood and solar options, restaurants, street food vendors and catering businesses across Indian are scrambling for alternatives amid LPG cylinder shortage.

With the government prioritising domestic cooking gas supply to households as the war disrupts global fuel lifelines, businesses dependent on commercial LPG are watching the situation anxiously.

In Delhi, many restaurants are left with stock for a day or two, fearing temporary closure and concerns over staff wages.

At the famous 'Chappan Dukan' street food hub in Madhya Pradesh's Indore, vendors have begun swapping traditional gas burners for electric appliances to keep the city's food culture alive.

The shopkeepers say they will also consider adopting solar-powered appliances if necessary.

The Indian RailwayCatering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) asking catering units in its western zone to switch to microwave ovens and induction plates.

The Uttarakhand government has begun preparing to supply firewood to businesses if the shortage deepens.

Restaurant owners and vendors in Puducherry and Rajasthan have either shifted to using firewood or are minimising the working hours to manage the situation, while also opting for electric cookers.

People buying LPG cyliner from a gas agency in the Jayamahal Extension area in Bengaluru on Wednesday—*MOHAMMAD ASAD*

The disruption in supply has begun to hit businesses across Rajasthan. Restaurant owners said the shortage is already affecting kitchens, while expenses on weddings are also set to increase.

Meanwhile, concerns over possible shortages have triggered panic buying and hoarding in some places.

In West Bengal, long queues were seen outside gas agency offices and at LPG dispensation centres for auto-rickshaws, most of which run on liquified petroleum gas, in Kolkata and several other cities, including Siliguri and Jalpaiguri.

Authorities have also begun cracking down on hoarding and black-marketing. The Indian Oil Corporation, which supplies LPG cylinders to almost 85 per cent of Northeast India, said it has adequate stocks to meet the demands and its nine bottling plants in the region were operating at full capacity.

The Bihar government said efforts are on ensure the supply of LPG cylinders. —*PTI*

58 AI flights to operate to West Asia

Air India and its low-cost subsidiary Air India Express operated a total of 58 scheduled and non-scheduled flights to and from West Asia on Wednesday. While Air India operated eight flights to and from Jeddah, Air India Express operayed 14 scheduled flights to and from Muscat. Air India and Air India Express also operateda total of 36 ad-hoc non-scheduled flights to and from the UAE, subject to the availability of slots and other prevailing conditions at the respective point of departure at the time. —*PTI*

> **Over 1 crore people will become unemployed due to the power shortage situation. 90 per cent of the LPG imported in India is from the Strait of Hormuz. In the next two days, 50 per cent of hotels are on the verge of shutdown, news is coming from Delhi NCR, Bihar.**
>
> - Arvind Kejriwal
> AAP leader

Customers gather outside an LPG gas godown to purchase cylinders amid a shortage of LPG supply in Solapur in Maharashtra on Wednesday—*PTI*

POLICE RECOVER 500 STOLEN LPG CYLINDERS IN UP, 7 ARRESTED

JHANSI, 11 MARCH

Police have arrested seven men after an encounter and recovered over 500 LPG cylinders stolen during the Holi festivities in Uttar Pradesh's Jhansi.

Acting on a tip-off, the police arrested Javed, Aamir, Ritik, Sumit, Shubhankar, Abhishek and Surendra, all residents of Jhansi, on Wednesday near a gas warehouse on the Gwalior Road, The police also recovered Rs 11.10 lakh in cash and Rs 83,820 believed to be proceeds from the sale of cylinders, from their possession.

The truck driver, Rajkumar, had parked the vehicle loaded with 524 filled LPG cylinders outsidehe Bharat Petroleum depot in the Sipri Bazar area on 2 March before leaving for his home to celebrate Holi.

When he returned on 6 March, the truck was missing, following which the owner, Neeraj Agrawal, lodged a complaint. The truck was later found abandoned in Baragaon, with its GPS damaged.

Police found that Javed and Ritik, the plant's former truck drivers had allegedly struck a deal worth Rs 13 lakh with a gas agency in Samthar to sell the cylinders. The police recovered all 524 stolen cylinders, including 389 filled and 135 empty ones, from the gas agency. The police have registered a case. —*PTI*

VIOLENCE IN WEST GARO HILLS

Meghalaya HC junks order on ST proof for poll nomination

SHILLONG, 11 MARCH

The Meghalaya High Court has struck down a notification, issued by the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GDACH) making Scheduled Tribe certificates compulsory for election nominations.

The notification, issued by the council's chief executive member following a resolution of the executive committee, sought to bar non-tribals from contesting the upcoming GHADC elections.

The petitioner, a voter, argued that it violated the Assam and Meghalaya Autonomous Districts (Constitution of District Councils) Rules, 1951, which govern voter and candidate qualifications. The petitioner's counsel said the notification "de-franchised legitimate non-tribal voters and candidates without amending the relevant rules", and "lacked approval from the district council and the Governor.

The GHADC argued that the notification was aimed at protecting tribal interests amid demographic changes.

The Meghalaya Board of school Education has postponed two of its class 12 exams due to clashes that broke out over the nomination process —*PTI*

The Meghalaya Board of School Education has postponed two of its class 12 exams in West Garo Hills where clashes broke out between tribal and non-triballs over the nomination process for local council polls. —*PTI*

Manipur protests over NRC demand before census

IMPHAL, 11 MARCH

Hundreds of people staged a demonstration here on Wednesday, demanding identification of illegal immigrants through the National Registrar of Citizens or any other exercise before the Manipur census.

A scuffle broke out between demonstrators and security personnel when the agitators tried to march outside the Khwairamband market, prompting the police to fire several rounds of tear gas shells to disperse the mob.

Three women sustained minor injuries during the protest, an official said.

During the protest march, the demonstrators held placards with 'Identify outsiders' written on them and raised slogans like 'No NRC, no census'.

Protesters hold placards and chant slogans demanding deferment of the census in Manipur and implementation of NRC in Imphal —*PTI*

"When they tried to breach police barricades, security personnel fired several rounds of tear gas shells to disperse the protesters," the officer said.

In another development, volunteers of 'Campaign for Just and Fair Delimitation' locked the office door of the State Academy of Training at Takyel in Imphal West district.

The members demanded that displaced persons return to their original homes before the census is conducted. —*PTI*

AI Express plane makes hard landing in Phuket

MUMBAI, 11 MARCH

An Air India Express Boeing 737 MAX plane made a suspected hard landing at the Phuket airport on Wednesday, detaching its two nose wheels.

The aircraft VT-BWQ operated the flight IX938 from Hyderabad to Phuket.

Passengers were deplaned and taken to the terminal building. There has been no injury to any person.

The number of passengers on board the plane could not be immediately ascertained.

Airport operations were temporarily suspended as the aircraft is stuck on the runway and was towed to the bay.

An Air India Express spokesperson said the plane experienced an issue with the nose wheel at the Phuket airport and the crew followed all standard protocols, and guests were deplaned.

An investigation would be carried out by the appropriate authority after consultation with Thailand aviation authorities. —*PTI*

Mother better custodian of infant: HC

MUMBAI, 11 MARCH

The Bombay High Court has ordered a man to hand over custody of his one-year-old daughter to his estranged wife, observing the child's best interests lie with the mother as she is still being breastfed.

The woman was forced to leave her matrimonial house after she was assaulted and since her sister-in-law snatched away her daughter, she could not take the child with her, a bench of Justices S V Kotwal and Sandesh Patil noted in the order passed on Tuesday.

"The child is dependent on the mother to some extent on breastfeeding. This is an important consideration," the HC said.

The order was passed in a habeas corpus plea filed by the woman seeking custody of her daughter. —*PTI*

SC asks Centre to form panel to decide NCERT course

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Centre to constitute a committee of domain experts to finalise the curriculum related to legal studies in NCERT textbooks.

The apex court was hearing a suo motu case on NCERT's Class 8 social science book containing "offending" contents on judicial corruption. It directed the Centre, states, Union Territories and universities to forthwith disassociate the three experts who drafted the controversial chapter.

It asked the Centre to constitute an expert committee to review the curriculum.—*PTI*

8 Naxalites surrender in Chhattisgarh

JAGDALPUR, 11 MARCH

A total of 108 Maoists carrying a collective reward of Rs 3.95 crore surrendered in Chhattisgarh's Bastar district on Wednesdayy.

Besides a huge stock of weapons, Rs 3.61 crore in cash and one kg of gold valued at about Rs 1.64 crore were recovered from Maoist dumps, the highest seizure of cash and valuables from a single location in the history of anti-Naxal operations, inspector general of police, Bastar Range, Sundarraj Pattilingam said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has set a deadline of March 31, 2026, for the eradication of Naxalism from the country.

Among the surrendered Naxalites, six were divisional committee members carrying a reward of Rs 8 lakh each.

The cadres, belonging to the Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee (DKSZC) of Maoists, turned themselves in at Jagdalpur. DKSZC formation of outlawed CPI (Maoists) orchestrated several deadly attacks in south Bastar in the past.

Information provided by the surrendered cadres helped security forces achieve significant successes Efforts are being made to ensure security and a dignified life for the surrendered cadres in the state. —*PTI*

CRYPTO PONZI SCAM

Darwin Labs co-founder held in Rs 20K cr Gain Bitcoin scam

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

The Central Bureau of Investigations has arrested Darwin Labs co-founder Ayush Varshney, one of the main accused in the Rs 20,000 crore Gain Bitcoin currency scam case.

The agency had issued a look out circular against Varshney. His attempt to flee the country on Monday triggered an alert, leading to his detention at the Mumbai airport. Varshney was formally arrested on Tuesday.

CBI detected the alleged involvement of Darwin Labs Private Limited and its co-founders -- Varshney, Sahil Baghla and Nikunj Jain, the chief capital officer and founder at Vaomi AI -- in the design, development and deployment of a cryptocurrency token known as MCAP and its associated ERC-20 smart contract.

Darwin Labs allegedly played a central role in building the technological architecture underpinning the cryptocurrency ponzi scam perpetrated through a web of platforms, including the flagship site www.gainbitcoin.com.

Amit Bhardwaj (now deceased) and Ajay Bhardwaj masterminded it.

The Gain Bitcoin operation was camouflaged under the facade of Variabletech Pte. Ltd.

The scheme lured investors by offering returns of 10 per cent per month in Bitcoin over an 18-months.

The funds collected were misappropriated. —*PTI*

'Aravallis lost 13.8% soil per year from 2017-24'

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

Built-up areas in India's Aravallis have increased 53 per cent, resulting in a 13.8 per cent increase in average soil lost per year during 2017-2024, a study has found.

Assessing land use and land cover patterns between 2001 and 2021, researchers from O.P. Jindal Global University and the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur found that steep slopes, susceptible soils and mining areas are strongly associated with erosion hotspots.

An increased soil erosion in the Aravalli Mountain System, despite a significant increase in afforestation, highlights that local conservation efforts cannot compensate for massive land conversion, according to findings published in the journal Geographies.

The Aravallis hosts a wide range of metallic and non-metallic minerals and serve as a cornerstone of India's mineral resource base.

Fine-scale measurement showed erosive processes and a sharp growth in built environments and a subsequent depopulation of rangelands and croplands. —*PTI*

KINGS OF THE WORLD?

A 12-foot-tall statue inspired by the film 'Titanic', depicting US President Donald Trump and late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, appeared on the National Mall in Washington, DC, on 10 March. Spray-painted gold, it shows Trump standing behind Epstein on a replica ship's bow, recreating the famous pose from the film as they face the Washington Monument. The sculpture is titled 'King of the World', after the iconic line from the movie. It was installed by an anonymous artist collective called The Secret Handshake. A plaque calls their relationship a 'tragic love story' built on 'luxurious travel, raucous parties and secret nude sketches' *-SCREENGRAB*

Iran war is a contest of who can take most pain

A crowd gathers in Iran's Tehran to support Mojtaba Khamenei as the successor to his late father Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as supreme leader *-PTI*

The war on Iran, for all its complexity and global consequences, may ultimately hinge on a stark question: who can endure the pain longer?

A surge in global oil prices suggests Iran's most potent weapon, and the US' greatest vulnerability, lies in the broader economic fallout of the conflict. The war has rattled energy markets, shaken financial systems and disrupted global travel and shipping, raising fears that prolonged instability could damage the world economy.

Oil prices surged to USD 120 a barrel on Monday, their highest level since 2022, before easing to around USD 90 after US President Donald Trump suggested the war would be "short-term".

For Iran, the costs are immediate and severe. The country faces near-constant American and Israeli airstrikes that it cannot effectively defend against. Yet despite the bombardment, the Islamic Republic's leadership and military command appear to remain in control.

Public anger inside Iran also persists. Nationwide protests earlier this year revealed dissatisfaction with the ruling theocracy. But as bombs fall, most citizens have stayed off the streets, focused on survival. Security forces have maintained a heavy presence in cities to prevent anti-government demonstrations.

The pressure extends far beyond Iran's borders. Gulf Arab states have faced repeated Iranian missile and drone attacks targeting oil facilities, cities and key infrastructure, including water plants. Some strikes have been fatal.

Israel, meanwhile, says it has inflicted heavy damage on Iran's missile systems and military infrastructure. Yet Iranian retaliation has continued with increasingly sophisticated missile strikes. Air-raid sirens frequently interrupt daily life in Israeli cities, forcing the closure of schools and workplaces and creating a climate of anxiety across the country.

For now, there is little sign of a diplomatic exit.

Neither Washington nor Tehran has softened its rhetoric. The hostility between the two countries stretches back decades, rooted in the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the seizure of the US Embassy in Tehran.

"We've already won in many ways, but we haven't won enough," Trump said during a speech in Florida on Monday. "We go forward, more determined than ever to achieve ultimate victory."

Iranian officials offered an equally defiant response. Kazem Gharibabadi of Iran's foreign ministry said Tehran had rejected ceasefire contacts from countries including China, France and Russia.

Iran had long warned that any attack on its territory would trigger retaliation across the Middle East. Now those threats have materialised. Missile and drone strikes have targeted the energy infrastructure of Gulf Arab neighbours. Qatar has halted natural gas production, while Bahrain said its oil sector could not meet contractual commitments. Other major producers, including Saudi Aramco, have also faced disruptions — a development that threatens energy supplies for large Asian consumers, particularly China.

Shipping has also been severely affected. Traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow entrance to the Persian Gulf through which roughly 20 per cent of the world's oil and gas trade passes, has largely halted.

Iran did not need to mine the waterway to achieve this. Attacks on several vessels prompted shipping companies to suspend operations through the strait, effectively shutting one of the world's most critical energy corridors. Up to 30 per cent of global fertiliser exports also pass through the route.

Early on Tuesday, the US president issued a stark warning on social media, threatening devastating retaliation if Iran attempted to block oil exports through the strait.

Iran responded with its own threat. The Revolutionary Guard declared it would not allow "a single litre of oil" to leave the Persian Gulf.

Amid the escalating rhetoric, the definition of victory remains unclear.

For Iran's clerical leadership, success may simply mean survival — remaining in power regardless of the economic devastation inflicted on the country.

Trump's objectives appear less clearly defined. At times he has suggested regime change in Tehran; at other moments he has indicated that weakening Iran's military capabilities and reducing its threat to Israel and the United States may suffice.

That ambiguity could provide Washington with flexibility to declare victory if the economic costs of the war begin to weigh heavily at home.

Even if the conflict ended today, however, significant challenges would remain.

Iran's leadership itself has already undergone a dramatic shift. After an Israeli airstrike killed Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, clerics elevated his son Mojtaba Khamenei, aged 56, to the position.

Long viewed by analysts as even more hard-line than his father, Mojtaba has strong ties to the Revolutionary Guard. Israel has already described him as a potential target, while Trump has said he would prefer another figure to lead Iran.

Another unresolved issue is Iran's nuclear programme. Before the war, Tehran had been enriching uranium to 60 per cent purity, close to the 90 per cent level required for weapons-grade material.

During the conflict, the United States bombed three Iranian nuclear facilities, likely burying much of the enriched uranium beneath debris. The sites remain inaccessible to international inspectors. —PTI

SALAR سالار

SIR redraws WB poll map in minority belts, TMC to suffer

The publication of West Bengal's post-SIR rolls has not just pruned 63.66 lakh names from the electorate, it has redrawn the state's demographic and political geometry ahead of the 2026 Assembly polls, recasting voter profiles across districts, border belts and marquee constituencies just weeks before the campaign drums begin to beat.

With the electorate reduced from 7.66 crore to just over 7.04 crore - an 8.3 per cent contraction- and 60.06 lakh names placed under adjudication, the state enters a fluid pre-poll phase marked by significant voter churn.

The deletions are geographically concentrated and politically consequential.

"SIR introduces three structural variables into the 2026 contest: demographic filtering in border belts, stress on social coalitions in Matua and minority districts, and recalibration in urban and Junglemahal regions that have seen BJP's expansion since 2019," political analyst Biswanath Chakraborty said.

The SIR has reshaped voter profiles across border districts, refugee-dominated pockets, minority-heavy belts, tribal zones and key urban constituencies. In a state where dozens of seats were decided by margins of 2,000–5,000 votes in 2021, even marginal shifts in rolls carry weight.

The sharpest churn is visible in districts bordering Bangladesh, where citizenship and migration politics have framed the contest between the TMC and the BJP.

In Nadia, 2.73 lakh names were deleted, reducing the electorate from 44.18 lakh to 41.45 lakh. North 24 Parganas saw its voter base shrink by nearly 10 lakh, from roughly 83 lakh to 73.88 lakh, with around six lakh names under adjudication. In Muslim-majority Malda, the electorate fell from 32 lakh to 29.88 lakh, with nearly nine lakh names under adjudication. Murshidabad recorded 2.93 lakh deletions from a base of 57.64 lakh voters, while 11 lakh names remain under scrutiny. South 24 Parganas, the state's largest district electorally, saw draft deletions of over 8 lakh, with around five lakh names pending adjudication.

Together, these districts influence more than 125 seats in the 294-member assembly. Minority-heavy belts such as Murshidabad, Malda and two 24 Parganas have traditionally delivered substantial leads to the TMC, often offsetting BJP's gains in north Bengal and Junglemahal.

"If even a slice of the 60.06 lakh names under adjudication is clustered in these border and minority belts, the final corrections could redraw constituency margins in a state where several seats in 2021 and 2024 turned on a few thousand votes, small shifts in inclusion or exclusion can tilt the balance of power," another political analyst Suman Bhattacharya said.

The churn has been sharpest in the Matua belt across North 24 Parganas, Nadia and north Bengal, where leaders claim nearly 90 per cent of the community has been hit -- an assertion that, if validated, could reverberate across 40–50 seats where the Dalit Hindu refugee bloc anchors the BJP's core vote bank.

For the BJP, the adjudication phase is both reinforcement and risk, strengthening its CAA plank while inviting backlash if refugee voters feel targeted. For the TMC, deletions in border and minority-heavy districts trigger urgent booth-level recalibration to protect its turnout-driven arithmetic.

In effect, the adjudication phase has introduced a layer of electoral uncertainty into districts that traditionally anchor the TMC's statewide arithmetic while serving as the BJP's principal expansion frontier. The battle for 2026, therefore, may hinge on how this demographic churn settles across these politically sensitive belts.

The TMC's vote-margin over the BJP narrowed from around 61 lakh in the 2021 assembly elections to roughly 42 lakh in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. The 2026 election is thus not a repeat of 2021's landslide but a contest framed by tightening bipolarity.

In Kolkata's urban core, traditionally a TMC stronghold, deletions have also drawn attention. North Kolkata's seven Assembly segments together saw around 4.07 lakh deletions.

Across four South Kolkata constituencies -- Bhabanipur, Kolkata Port, Rashbehari and Ballygunge, the electorate dipped from 6,91,306 in the draft to 6,88,099 in the final phase, with 78,657 names under adjudication.

In Bhabanipur, represented by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, 47,094 names were struck off across the draft and final stages, with over 14,000 electors under adjudication. The deletions are roughly 11,000 fewer than Banerjee's 2021 bypoll victory margin of over 58,000 votes.

Yet in Nandigram, the high-voltage constituency represented by Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari, the final rolls show a net addition of 770 voters compared to the draft list, taking the electorate to 2,68,378. In 2021, Nandigram was decided by just 1,956 votes. Paschim Medinipur saw total deletions rise to over 2.21 lakh, with over one lakh under adjudication. Jalpaiguri in north Bengal recorded deletions of roughly 1.5 lakh since SIR began, bringing its electorate down to around 17.48 lakh.

Alipurduar in north Bengal recorded 1,02,835 deletions, with 11,96,651 names featuring in the final rolls. These belts, particularly Junglemahal and north Bengal, were BJP growth zones in 2019 and 2021. —*PTI*

In Bhabanipur, represented by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, 47,094 names were struck off across the draft and final stages, with over 14,000 electors under adjudication —*PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Not death, but dignity: Family welcomes SC's decision on euthanasia

- The family of a 32-year-old Ghaziabad man who has been in a coma-like state for more than 12 years said the Supreme Court's decision allowing passive euthanasia would finally restore his dignity after years of irreversible suffering.

Harish Rana has remained in a permanent vegetative state since August 2013, when he suffered severe head injuries after falling from the fourth floor of his paying guest accommodation *-PTI*

The family of a 32-year-old Ghaziabad man who has been in a coma-like state for more than 12 years said the Supreme Court's decision allowing passive euthanasia would finally restore his dignity after years of irreversible suffering.

Harish Rana has remained in a permanent vegetative state since August 2013, when he suffered severe head injuries after falling from the fourth floor of his paying guest accommodation. For more than a decade, he has survived only through clinically assisted nutrition and hydration administered through a feeding tube.

In their plea before the Supreme Court, his family said the artificial feeding system merely sustained his biological survival without offering any therapeutic benefit or possibility of recovery.

Allowing the plea on Wednesday, the apex court permitted withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment and directed the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) to admit Rana for palliative care and prepare a tailored plan for the withdrawal process while ensuring dignity.

For the Rana family, the decision came after years of emotional and financial strain.

Shortly after the judgment was pronounced, a crowd of journalists and television cameramen gathered outside the Brahm Raj Empire residential society in Ghaziabad, where the family currently lives. Security personnel tightened access at the complex and prevented outsiders from entering the premises.

Inside the building, however, the family remained largely silent.

Rashmi Nandakumar, the lawyer who represented the Ranas in the Supreme Court, told PTI that the family members were not in a position to speak publicly about the decision immediately after the verdict.

When PTI attempted to contact Ashok Rana, Harish's father, the call was answered but there was no response from the other end.

Neighbours said the family had endured years of hardship caring for their son.

According to local residents, Ashok Rana and his wife Nirmala sold their house in Delhi to cover medical expenses during the long years of treatment and care.

Ashok Rana, who once worked in the catering department of a large hospitality chain, now receives a monthly pension of about Rs 3,600, residents said. To supplement the family income, he also sells sandwiches at nearby cricket grounds in the mornings, according to a resident of the society who requested anonymity. The resident urged the media to give the family privacy following the court's decision, describing the issue as deeply personal and emotionally exhausting.

For more than a decade, the Ranas cared for their son at home. Their petition before the Supreme Court said Harish has remained in an "irreversible and incurable permanent vegetative state" with 100 per cent disability.

He survives only through a percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy tube that provides clinically assisted nutrition and hydration. The family told the court that continuing such treatment only prolonged life artificially without any realistic chance of recovery.

Their plea relied on the constitutional principle of the Right to Live with Dignity under Article 21, arguing that the law permits withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment when a patient is in an incurable and irreversible condition. The Ranas stressed that their request was not motivated by a desire to cause death but by the belief that continued medical intervention was not in Harish's best interests.

They asked the court to consider whether it was appropriate to artificially prolong biological life through medical support when recovery was medically impossible.

Two medical boards constituted under the court's directions examined Rana's condition and confirmed that it was irreversible.

Both the primary and secondary boards concluded that he had remained in a permanent vegetative state for more than 12 years and that continued medical treatment could not improve his neurological condition. The secondary medical board also observed that the feeding tube being used in his case only provided sustenance for survival and could not restore cognitive function or reverse the underlying brain injury.

The family had earlier approached the Delhi High Court in 2024 seeking directions for the constitution of a medical board under the Supreme Court's guidelines in the Common Cause judgment on passive euthanasia.

The High Court dismissed the plea, stating that Rana was not dependent on mechanical life support. The family later moved the Supreme Court, which directed authorities to provide home medical care with assistance from the Union health ministry and the Uttar Pradesh government while granting them liberty to seek further directions.

After Rana's condition deteriorated and he was hospitalised in May 2025, the apex court ordered the constitution of fresh medical boards to examine the case.

Both boards reiterated that his condition was irreversible and that continued medical intervention could not restore brain function.

The family told the court that their request for withdrawal of life support was therefore based on medical evidence as well as the legal framework developed by the Supreme Court for passive euthanasia.

They also pointed out that the guidelines laid down in the Common Cause ruling were meant to ensure such decisions are taken in the patient's best interests while respecting the right to die with dignity.

—*PTI*

Iran says banks, tech giants are targets

Threatens Google, Microsoft; toll mounts in Lebanon; strikes continue in Tehran & Gulf

Rescue workers gather at the site where Israeli airstrikes hit apartments in Beirut, Lebanon, on Wednesday —PTI

DUBAI, 11 MARCH

A joint Iranian military command said on Wednesday that banks, financial institutions and technology companies are now a target in the Middle East as strikes continued across Wes Asia.

The Khatam al-Anbiya Headquarters issued a statement identifying the targets.

These tech companies that are now targets include Google, Microsoft, Palantir, IBM, Nvidia and Oracle, Tasnim News Agency said. The company's offices are spread in Israel and Gulf countries.

The statement came after Iranian media reported staff at a bank in Tehran had been killed in Israeli-American airstrikes. Israeli and US strikes continued across Iran, but the extent of the damage was not immediately clear.

Airstrikes on a highway in eastern Tehran resulted in 'significant casualties', even though the exact target was unclear —X@HRANA_ENGLISH

UAE'S OIL LIT UP

The largest oil refinery in the United Arab Emirates, located in Ruwais, has suspended operations following a drone strike that sparked a fire in the industrial area.

Two Iranian drones also hit near Dubai International Airport, the world's busiest for international travel. Four people were wounded, but flights continued, the Dubai Media Office said.

Saudi Arabia said it intercepted five drones heading toward the kingdom's Shaybah oil field, while Kuwait said its defences downed eight Iranian drones. Drones were also reported in Bahrain.

LEBANON TOLL MOUNTS

Lebanon's Health Ministry says that the death toll has risen to 570. Israeli airstrikes across the country – including in Beirut – killed at least 19 people on Wednesday. The dead included 86 children.

BOMBS ON THE WATER

At least three naval vessels were targeted on Wednesday, the UK Maritime Trade Operations centre, run by the British military, said.

IRAQ ON ALERT

The US Embassy in Baghdad urged US citizens on Wednesday to leave Iraq, citing the risk of attacks and kidnappings. This came after an Iranian-backed militant group claimed responsibility for the death of at least five people, and have launched dozens of missile and drone attacks on US bases and diplomatic facilities, energy and communications sites in Iraq, particularly in the northern Kurdish region. —*Agencies*

US-ISRAELI STRIKES POUND CIVILIAN INFRA

Joint Israel-US airstrikes have been indiscriminate in what they target. Here's the civilian infrastructure that has been damaged in Iran:

19,734 CIVILIAN UNITS

16,191 RESIDENTIAL UNITS

3,384 COMMERCIAL UNITS

*SOURCE: IRAN RED CRESCENT

'Rogue state'

The President of the US openly expressed pride in the destruction of civilian infrastructure, Iran's navy and killing of Iranian sailors. Their attention, their intention is to terrorise civilians, massacre innocent people and cause maximum destruction and suffering. The world is witnessing how a rogue state... is targeting the Iranian schools, hospitals, residential building, infrastructure, sports hall and relief facilities.... It is deeply regrettable that (UN) Security Council continues to remain silent.... Today it is Iran. Tomorrow it could be any other sovereign state

—Amir-Saeid Iravani, Iran's Ambassador to the UN

'World War 3'

I see a calamity building and a lot of blood flowing. It's kind of a mass murder of civilians by Israel and the US. This is not targeted bombing, it's carpet bombing. They're killing indiscriminately. The consequences for the world will be completely awful.... A lot of people believe that the worse it gets, the closer we get to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ... We've not seen anything like it since World War 2. This is even beyond the Iraq war (where) they had the dignity to hide the motivations. It's just to kill anybody and everybody... We're heading to World War 3 and we're being led by extraordinarily violent governments

— Jeffrey Sachs, American Economist to Piers Morgan

NOBEL WARRIOR?

Iran mocked Trump with a poster of him with Nobel medal over dead children —X @KHAMENEI_FA

IEA orders largest oil reserve release

PARIS, 11 MARCH

The International Energy Agency (IEA) announced the release of 400 million barrels of oil reserves on Wednesday to counter the impact of the West Asia war on energy markets.

This is the largest emergency oil release in its history.

Drawn from reserves held by its 32 members, the release exceeds the 182.7 million barrels deployed after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. IEA countries hold over 1.2 billion barrels in public emergency stocks and 600 million in industry reserves.

"This is a major action aiming to alleviate the immediate impacts of the disruption in markets," Birol added.

"The most important thing for a return to stable flows of oil and gas is the resumption of transit through the Strait of Hormuz."

Notably, the volume is equivalent to 20 days of exports through the Strait of Hormuz. Germany and Austria said on Wednesday that they would release parts of their oil reserves following an IEA request. Japan also said it will release some of its reserves starting on Monday.

Germany said the IEA asked Germany to release 2.64 million tonnes of its oil reserves. IEA nations have released emergency stocks on five previous occasions: During the 1990-1991 Gulf War, after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, during the Libyan invasion in 2011, and twice after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. —*PTI*

US SAYS IT DESTROYED 16 MINE-LAYING VESSELS IN HORMUZ

DUBAI, 11 MARCH

Explosions as US forces strike an Iranian vessel near the Strait of Hormuz on Wednesday —PTI

The US said it destroyed 16 mine-laying Iranian vessels on Tuesday, while the Islamic Republic vowed to block the region's oil exports, saying it would not allow "even a single litre" to be shipped to its enemies.

US President Donald Trump said on Truth Social that there were no reports of Iran planting explosives in the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 per cent of the world's oil is shipped.

Trump threatened to hit Iran at "a level never seen before" if Tehran failed to immediately remove any mines it might have deployed in the channel.

However, reports suggest that Iran has attempted to deploy only a dozen mines, but retains the capacity to plant thousands more through the use of small boats. —*Agencies*

FOURTH OF THE WORLD'S OIL PASSES THROUGH THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ

- 20 million barrels of oil per day - roughly 25% of global seaborne oil trade - passed through the Strait of Hormuz in 2024.
- 84% of the 14.3 million barrels of crude oil per day went to Asia.
- China imported roughly 5 million barrels/day through the Strait (30% of its oil imports) in 2025.
- India imported roughly 2 million barrels/day through the Strait (14%).
- Japan imported roughly 1.5 million barrels/day through the Strait (90%).
- Pakistan imports 80% of its oil, much of it coming through Hormuz.

- 16% was destined towards Europe and other regions.
- 16 million tonnes of global seaborne fertiliser trade (one-third), passes through the waterway. Disruptions, could impacts for Sudan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Sahel countries.

SOURCE: UNCTAD DATA, NEWS REPORTS

UN warns of spike in cost of living

The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) warned in a report of significant risks to global trade and development, including higher food prices and cost-of-living "particularly for the most vulnerable", if the Strait of Hormuz remains closed. It noted that when gas prices go up, the cost of fertilisers increases, pointing to the start of Russia's war on Ukraine.

Canada is not participating in the United States and Israeli offensive and will never participate in it.

—Mark Carney, Canadian Prime Minister

PENTAGON SAYS

140 US troops have been injured

8 severely | **7** killed so far

—FREEPIK

WIN FOR AMERICANS: DON HAILS RELIANCE REFINERY DEAL

>>>*Continued from Page 1*

US President Donald Trump hailed the proposed Reliance-backed refinery in Texas as "a massive win for American workers, energy and the great people of South Texas".

The Brownsville project was proposed by Element Fuels, which completed site preparation for a hydrogen-powered facility in June 2024. The location already holds permits for a refinery capable of processing about 1,60,000 barrels of oil a day. The US currently has 132 operating refineries with a combined capacity of about 18.4 million barrels a day, according to the US Energy Information Administration. Most facilities were built decades ago and are designed to process heavier crude imported from countries such as Venezuela and Canada rather than the lighter oil produced from US shale.

Reliance has long maintained commercial ties with the United States through energy trading, technology partnerships and investments. The conglomerate previously invested in US shale gas assets and sells large volumes of fuel in the American market. It also sources crude, petrochemical feedstocks and technology from US partners.

AFR said it signed a 20-year offtake term sheet with an unnamed "global supermajor", covering 1.2 billion barrels of US shale oil worth about $125 billion. The refinery is expected to produce 50 billion gallons of refined products valued at $175 billion. PTI

Can't mediate when under attack: Qatar

Qatar said it won't serve as a mediator for Iran if it is under attack. Both Qatar and Oman worked to "build bridges between Iran and the West," Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al-Khulaifi, Qatar's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs told Al Jazeera. "We will not be able to fulfill that role under attack, and that's something the Iranians need to understand. The regional countries are not an enemy of Iran."

Mojtaba Khamenei is safe and sound: Iran

Newly appointed Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei is "safe and sound", said Yousef Pezeshkian the son of the Iranian President, amid reports that Israel or US strikes had injured him. The New York Times had earlier claimed that Khamenei was injured and was avoiding public appearances.

North Korea backs Khamenei as Kim tests missiles

SEOUL, 11 MARCH

North Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced its support for the choice of Iran to select Mojtaba Khamenei as supreme leader, the son of late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed in a joint US-Israeli attack at the start of the war on Iran. Following the launch of the US-Israel war on Iran on 28 February, North Korea had condemned the conflict as "gangster-like conduct." North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and his daughter — Kim Ju Ae, aged 13 — observed strategic cruise missile tests from a warship on Tuesday, state media reported. The launch serves as a threatened response to ongoing US-South Korean springtime military drills, which Pyongyang views as an invasion rehearsal. —*AGENCIES*

Aus grants asyulm to 2 more Iranian football players

GOLD COAST, 11 MARCH

Two more Iranian women football players were granted asylum by Australia before the rest of the squad departed, Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke said on Wednesday. Earlier, five Iranian players had sought asylum, bringing the total up to seven women granted humanitarian visas. One of those in the latter group was a player and the other a team staffer, Burke said. The rest of the team left Sydney late Tuesday for Iran amid protests at their hotel and the airport. The women came under scrutiny after they refused to sing the Iranian national anthem during the Women's Asian Cup —*PTI*

6 killed as Swiss bus goes up in flames

GENEVA, 11 MARCH

Swiss police are investigating whether the bus fire that killed six people and injured 5 others was started deliberately. The fire broke out on Tuesday in the main street of the small town of Kerzers, about 20 km west of the Swiss capital Berne. Rescue teams noted that the bus was totally engulfed in flames. Police spokesperson Frederic Papaux said a yet-to-be-determined "voluntary act" could have caused the fire. Responding to claims that a passenger ignited a fire by pouring flammable liquid on themselves, Fribourg police spokesperson Christa Bielmann said the matter is 'part of the ongoing investigation' and remains under clarification. Authorties don't suspect terror. —*PTI*

Woman charged for shooting near Riri's home

LOS ANGELES, 11 MARCH

Los Angeles police have charged a woman in the shooting near the home of Grammy Award-winning performer Rihanna. She and her children were at their Beverly Hills home when a woman fired at the property on Tuesday. No injuries were reported. Suspect Ivanna Lisette Ortiz, 35, withdrew her initial not guilty plea. Facing 14 felony counts and a potential life sentence, Ortiz is charged with firing at Rihanna's home, a trailer, and a neighbour's house, along with 10 counts of assault involving Rihanna, her family, staff, and neighbours. Rihanna and her partner, rapper ASAP Rocky, were on the property during the Sunday afternoon shooting, along with other family members and staff, LA District Attorney Nathan Hochman said. —*PTI*

MONEY COMES, MONEY GOES

'US military spent $9M on steaks, lobsters'

WASHINGTON, 11 MARCH

The US Department of Defence under **Pete Hegseth** spent $9 million on crab and lobster meals in the months leading up to President Donald Trump's war with Iran, according to a report by government watchdog Open the Books.

The analysis found the Pentagon spent $6.9 million on lobster tail and $2 million on Alaskan king crab in September 2025 alone. It also purchased $15.1 million worth of ribeye steak and $1 million of salmon during the month.

Other food-related purchases included 272 doughnut orders costing $139,224, $124,000 for ice-cream machines, and $26,000 for sushi preparation tables.

The spending formed part of a broader $93 billion outlay by the Pentagon in September, the final month of the US fiscal year, when federal agencies often rush to use up budgets under the "use-it-or-lose-it" funding system.

Beyond food, the department spent $5.3 million on Apple devices, including iPads, and $1.8 million on musical instruments, including a $98,329 Steinway grand piano purchased for the Air Force chief of staff's residence.

Furniture purchases totalled $225.6 million, including $60,719 worth of chairs from premium manufacturer Herman Miller and $12,540 for fruit-basket stands. The Pentagon also spent $111,497 on footrests, $3,160 on children's stickers, and $19.3 million on garbage collection.

The largest portion of spending went towards grants and contracts worth more than $90 billion. In the last five working days of September alone, the Pentagon spent $50.1 billion, more than the annual defence budgets of countries such as Israel and Italy, the report said. —*Salar News*

HEGSETH'S SPENDING SPREE

- $6.9M— Lobster tail
- $15.1M— Ribeye steak
- $139,224 — 272 doughnut orders
- $5.3M — Apple devices, including iPads
- $98,329 — Steinway grand piano
- $225.6 million— spent on furniture

UK to release files on Mandelson-Epstein link

LONDON, 11 MARCH

The British government announced on Wednesday that it will publish files regarding Peter Mandelson's appointment as US ambassador, coinciding with an ongoing investigation into Mandelson's ties to convicted sex criminal Jeffrey Epstein.

Lawmakers have forced Prime Minister Keir Starmer to disclose files on his decision to appoint Mandelson to a key diplomatic post at the start of US President Donald Trump's second term.

The documents are being released in batches after review by Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee, with police blocking files that could compromise their investigation into Mandelson.

Epstein files released by the US Department of Justice in January suggest that Mandelson shared market-sensitive information with Epstein, including a report on raising funds through asset sales and lobbying to reduce bankers' bonus taxes.

Starmer fired Mandelson in September, but is facing a political storm over his decision to give him the Washington job in the first place.

Mandelson, 72, a former Cabinet member of the governing Labour Party, was arrested on 23 February. He has been released without bail conditions as the police investigation continues. —*PTI*

—FREEPIK

Rupee declines 16P to 92.01 against USD

MUMBAI, 11 MARCH

The rupee declined 16 paise to settle at 92.01 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, weighed down by a sharp rise in global crude oil prices and a stronger greenback as the war in West Asia raged on. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 91.92 against the US dollar and traded in the range of 91.85-92.06 before settling at 92.01 (provisional), down 16 paise from its previous close. The rupee staged a strong recovery from its record low against the US dollar on Tuesday, gaining 36 paise to settle at 91.85. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.14 per cent higher at 98.96. —*PTI*

CRED to operate as payment aggregator

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

Fintech platform CRED on Wednesday said it has received the final authorisation from the Reserve Bank of India to operate as a payment aggregator. With this, CRED and its subsidiaries now hold two Reserve Bank of India (RBI) authorisations, including the Prepaid Payment Instrument (PPI) license. The Bengaluru-based firm reported a reduction in operating losses to Rs 298 crore in FY25, from Rs 609 crore in FY24, on the back of product portfolio expansion. It saw its consolidated operating revenue grow by 16 per cent to Rs 2,735 crore in FY25. CRED currently has a member base of over 1.5 crore. —*PTI*

98% HRs say better English assessment needed in hiring

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

98 per cent HR leaders in India say their organisations would be more efficient if better English assessments were used during hiring, while most of them believe AI cannot compensate for poor English proficiency, according to the TOEIC Global English Skills Report released by Educational Testing Services (ETS). Princeton-based ETS, which is known for conducting exams like TOEFL and GRE, has published the report based on an online survey of 87 HR decision makers in India. "Most HR leaders believe AI cannot compensate for poor English proficiency, reinforcing the need for reliable assessment," it added.While 94 per cent of HR decision makers in India say increased global collaboration heightens the need for English proficiency, 84 per cent of HR leaders in India say lacking English proficiency creates a competitive disadvantage. The report cited that 87 per cent of HR decision makers in India say AI integration increases the need for English proficiency. —*PTI*

PhonePe launches 'On-The-Go' card for seamless pay

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

PhonePe has announced the launch of the PhonePe 'RuPay On-The-Go' Card, a National Common Mobility Card (NCMC). This launch is a step towards India's 'One Nation One Card' vision, aimed at digitizing transit payments across India. The PhonePe 'On-The-Go' Card is designed to simplify the user's daily commute by functioning as an all-in-one transit card. It allows for quick, tap-and-pay transactions on all NCMC-enabled services, including metros, buses, trains, tolls, and parking across India in a fully interoperable manner. A key feature is that the cards are issued instantly, enhancing convenience for millions of commuters. The card utilizes a prepaid, stored-value model where balance is stored directly on the card's chip. —*PTI*

Investors poorer by Rs 5.14 lakh crore

Sensex tumbles 1,342.27 points, while Nifty tanks 394.75 points; 2,380 stocks declined

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

Investors' wealth eroded by Rs 5.14 lakh crore on Wednesday as stock markets fell after a day's breather due to a surge in global crude oil prices amid growing tensions in West Asia.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 1,342.27 points or 1.72 per cent to settle at 76,863.71. During the day, it dropped 1,446.72 points or 1.84 per cent to 76,759.26.

The 50-share NSE Nifty tanked 394.75 points or 1.63 per cent to end at 23,866.85.

A total of 2,380 stocks declined, while 1,881 advanced and 153 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies faced an erosion of Rs 5,14,063.2 crore to Rs 4,41,90,196.39 crore (USD 4.81 trillion).

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 5.76 per cent to USD 92.86 per barrel.

"Markets plunged sharply on Wednesday, losing over one and a half per cent and resuming their corrective phase amid weak global cues and heightened geopolitical tensions. Investor sentiment remained fragile as escalating geopolitical tensions in the Middle East continued to unsettle global markets and push volatility higher.

"Concerns over potential disruptions to crude oil supply, rising inflationary pressures and the possible impact on economic growth kept participants cautious," Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Additionally, continued foreign institutional investor selling and weakness in the rupee further dampened risk appetite, he added.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Bajaj Finance, Axis Bank, Bajaj Finserv, Mahindra & Mahindra, Maruti, Bharti Airtel, Trent and Kotak Mahindra Bank were among the major laggards.

NTPC, Sun Pharma and Power Grid were the gainers.

Among BSE sectoral indices, auto tumbled 3.06 per cent, bankex (2.06 per cent), Private Banks index (2.03 per cent), BSE Top 10 Banks (2.03 per cent), financial services (1.99 per cent), consumer discretionary (1.89 per cent) and PSU Bank (1.87 per cent).

In contrast, BSE energy, healthcare, utilities, oil & gas and power were the gainers.

The BSE midcap select index tanked 1.55 per cent, and the smallcap select index declined 0.61 per cent. —*PTI*

WEST ASIA WAR

- A total of 2,380 stocks declined, while 1,881 advanced and 153 remained unchanged on the BSE.The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies faced an erosion of Rs 5,14,063.2 crore to Rs 4,41,90,196.39 crore (USD 4.81 trillion).

HOW MARKETS PERFORMED

DOW US	47,409.81	(0.67%) ↓
S&P 500 US	6,795.39	(0.10%)↑
Nasdaq US	22,723.82	(0.12%) ↑
Nikkei Japan	55,025.37	(1.43%) ↑
Hang Seng CHN	25,898.76	(0.24%) ↓
DAX GERMANY	23,608.87	(1.50%) ↓
FTSE 100 UK	10,353.77	(0.56%) ↓
CAC 40 PARIS	8,041.81	(0.19%) ↓
KOSPI (South Korea)	5,609.95	(1.40%) ↑

Shipping firm to levy emergency bunker surcharge

Integrated shipping and logistics company Maersk has decided to levy a temporary emergency bunker surcharge on new cargo bookings to ensure the cross-border movement of essential items amid the ongoing crisis in West Asia. However, the surcharge is subject to regulatory approvals and will apply globally without exception from 25 March. New bookings are being taken from, and to markets such as India and other non-affected countries in the far east, Europe, official said. —*PTI*

FPI holdings in FAR G-Secs falls to Rs 4,634 crore

MUMBAI, 11 MARCH

Foreign portfolio investors' (FPI) bets in Fully Accessible Route (FAR) government securities have declined by about Rs 4,634 crore since the start of the Middle East conflict, reflecting growing caution among overseas investors amid rising crude oil prices, a weakening rupee and rising bond yields.

Data from the Clearing Corporation of India Ltd (CCIL) showed that total FPI investment in FAR securities stood at about Rs 3.26 lakh crore on Tuesday, down from Rs 3.31 lakh crore on 27 February, before the conflict began.

Brent crude prices have surged past USD 100 per barrel and were trading around USD 108 per barrel, raising concerns about inflationary pressures and India's external balance. Market participants said the combination of higher oil prices and currency depreciation has made foreign investors more cautious towards Indian sovereign debt.

The recent outflows mark a reversal in trend after strong inflows earlier this year, when expectations of India's inclusion in global bond indices and relatively stable macroeconomic conditions had attracted foreign investors to local government debt. —*PTI*

Silver & gold prices plunge

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

Silver prices plunged Rs 4,269 to Rs 2.73 lakh per kg in futures trade on Wednesday as a strong US dollar weighed on the precious metal despite ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia.

Meanwhile, gold prices declined Rs 853 to Rs 1.62 lakh per 10g in futures trade on Wednesday tracking a bearish sentiment in the international markets amid mixed signals surrounding the ongoing conflict in West Asia

According to the Multi Commodity Exchange, the yellow metal for April delivery depreciated by Rs 853, or 0.52 per cent, to Rs 1,62,450 per 10g in a business turnover of 7,529 lots.

In the international markets, gold futures on the Comex for April delivery slipped USD 30.15, or 0.58 per cent, to USD 5,211.95 per ounce. Globally, Comex silver futures for may contract fell by USD 2.03, or 2.3 per cent, to USD 87.55 per developments. —*PTI*

Flipkart to invite banks for IPO in April

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

Walmart-backed e-commerce giant Flipkart is gearing up for its potential initial public offering (IPO) in India. The company plans to invite banks to pitch for the work as early as next month, Bloomberg reported.

This comes after there was an informal discussions with investors and bankers about a possible listing in Mumbai. The exact timing of Flipkart's IPO remains uncertain, with sources saying it could happen later this year or early in 2027.

If it happens, it will likely include a secondary share sale by existing investors like-Walmart.

The proceeds from the IPO would be used to further expand Flipkart's business operations.Founded in 2007, Flipkart has grown into one of India's largest e-commerce platforms with over 500 million registered users. Walmart acquired a 77 per cent stake in the firm for USD 16 billion in 2018 and has since increased its holding through additional purchases.

Flipkart also received approval from the government to shift its domicile from Singapore to India, a major move toward a domestic listing.

The company competes with global players like Amazon, Reliance's JioMart, and Tata Group in India's massive online retail space. —*PTI*

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

Crude oil prices jumped Rs 460 to Rs 7,881 per barrel in futures trade on Wednesday as global benchmarks advanced due to intensifying geopolitical tensions.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), crude oil for March delivery climbed Rs 460, or 6.2 per cent, to Rs 7,881 per barrel in a business turnover of 16,930 lots.

Similarly, the April contract also appreciated by Rs 462, or nearly 6.3 per cent, to Rs 7,815 per barrel in 7,833 lots.

Analysts said crude oil prices remained volatile as traders assessed supply risks stemming from the ongoing conflict in West Asia and disruptions to tanker movement through the Strait of Hormuz.

In international markets, West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude oil futures for April delivery rose nearly 3 per cent to trade at USD 85.74 per barrel, and Brent Oil for the May contract went up by 2.47 per cent to USD 89.97 per barrel in New York.

According to analysts, the International Energy Agency (IEA) proposed the largest release of oil reserves in its history, surpassing the 182 million barrels the group released in 2022 when Russia invaded Ukraine.

IEA member countries currently hold over 1.2 billion barrels of public emergency oil stocks, along with around 600 million barrels of industry stocks held under government obligation. —*PTI*

Oil price hike to hit IOC, BPCL, HPCL profits: S&P

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

S&P Global Ratings predicted on Wednesday a fall in profit margins of major oil marketing companies, including IOC, BPCL, and HPCL, as they are likely to retain petrol and diesel prices to avoid inflationary pressures.

In India, LPG prices for consumers are regulated.

"The government may use budgetary allocations and excise duty cuts to ease resulting pressures on the OMCs, as it has done during the Russia-Ukraine conflict, but this remains uncertain," S&P said.

India imports 88 per cent of its crude, making it the world's third-largest oil importer.

Of its 5.8 million bpd consumption, 2.5–2.7 million barrels pass through the now closed Strait of Hormuz, which supplies 55 per cent of LPG and 30 per cent of LNG India maintains limited reserves.

Strategic petroleum reserves cover only 10 days of consumption, while commercial stocks account for roughly 65 days. Stockpiles for LPG and LNG are even tighter. —*PTI*

GAIL BUYS OMAN LNG CARGO AS INDIA FOCUSES ON KEY SECTORS

Gas supplier GAIL bought an Omani LNG cargo as India diverts supplies from non-priority sectors to meet key demand. India faces a supply crunch after the Strait of Hormuz closure, with imports meeting half of its natural gas demand.

GAIL has bought the cargo from a European trader at a fixed price of USD 17 to 20 per million unit. The cargo loaded on the vessel Orion Hugo, chartered by Shell, is scheduled to arrive in India around 15 March. —*PTI*

'Indian fuel retailers face cash-flow pressure'

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

State-owned fuel retailers Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) absorbing the impact of elevated global energy prices will lead to heightened margin and cash-flow volatility, Moody's Ratings said on Wednesday.

"Domestic retail prices of fuels have remained largely steady since April 2022, despite swings in global oil and gas prices and the country's high dependence on imports," Moody's said in a note.

"The companies will bear rising input costs from higher energy prices without corresponding increases in selling prices because the government's influence over retail pricing prevents timely cost pass-throughs."

The three firms control nearly 90 per cent of retail fuel outlets in the country.

However, retail pump rates have not been revised as the three oil marketing companies (OMCs) continue to absorb the elevated global energy prices.

Domestic retail prices of petrol and diesel have remained largely unchanged since April 2022, despite global oil and gas price volatility, reflecting the government's involvement in fuel pricing. —*PTI*

20 ACTIVE GROUPS

Cyber frauds using new tech to bypass UPI services: Report

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

Online fraudsters are using new technology that bypasses security features of UPI apps to carry out financial transactions, cyber intelligence firm CloudSEK claimed in a report.

According to the report, the firm has identified at least 20 active groups on messaging platform Telegram, each with over 100 members, where a toolkit by the name of "Digital Lutera" is being CloudSEK claims to have done an analysis of one such group alone which indicates that transactions worth Rs 25-30 lakh were processed over just two days, highlighting how quickly the fraud model is scaling and the number of victims' connections.

SIM-binding has been treated as a proof that a bank account is securely tied to a specific device. UPI apps process transactions after verifying the SIM of the phone number with which the account associated with it is installed in the mobile phone.

CloudSEK said the attack typically begins when a user unknowingly installs a malicious APK disguised as something routine, such as a traffic fine notice or a wedding invitation. Once installed, the malware gains access to the victim's phone's SMS permissions.

"Fake "sent" SMS entries are inserted into the phone's message records to make everything appear legitimate. The result is disturbing: a victim's UPI account can be registered and controlled on a completely different device — even though the actual SIM card never leaves the victim's phone," the report said. —*PTI*

PayPal Mafia leader Peter Thiel sells complete shares in Nvidia

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

A hedge fund of **Peter Thiel**, the first outside investor in Facebook and leader of the 'PayPal Mafia', has sold off all its holdings in Nvidia Corp., amid rising concerns of an AI bubble.

Thiel Macro LLC offloaded its entire position of 537,742 shares in Nvidia, worth USD 100 million based on the closing price on 30 September.

The fund now counts Apple Inc., Microsoft Corp. and a reduced stake in Tesla Inc. as its main bets, according to a 13F filing.

Thiel's move comes at a time of rising concerns about an AI investment bubble, which turned Nvidia into the world's most valuable company.

The 'Big Short' investor Michael Burry, has been perhaps the highest profile critic, disclosing bearish wagers against Nvidia and Palantir Technologies Inc.

Japan's SoftBank Group Corp. also announced it sold off its shares in Nvidia in October for USD 5.83 billion.

Meanwhile, Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang said that artificial intelligence is driving the 'largest infrastructure buildout in human history'.

Equating the importance AIs rise to that of electricity, he emphasised that this shift demands trillions in capital and a significant expansion of the skilled workforce.

Huang said AI factories need skilled workers—electricians, plumbers, steelworkers, technicians—offering well-paid jobs in short supply, and no PhD is required.

He added that AI has upended the traditional computing model based on structured data and precise queries.

AI crossed a critical threshold, with models generating real economic value in various sectors. —*Agencies*

-PTI

Asian Weightlifting C'ships in India postponed

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

The Asian Weightlifting Championships, scheduled to be held in Ahmedabad in April, have been postponed to May due to the ongoing conflict in West Asia. The continental event, originally slated for 1 to 10April, has been pushed back by over a month and will now be held from 12 to 17 May. The Asian Weightlifting Federation (AWF) said the rescheduling was done to ensure the "safe and smooth participation" of all delegations. "Due to the current situation affecting the Middle East and the Gulf region, the 2026 AWF Asian Senior Weightlifting Championships have been rescheduled," the AWF said in a statement. "To ensure the safe and smooth participation of all delegations, the competition will now take place from 12 to 17 May 2026," the statement added. The ongoing Middle East conflict that began with US and Israeli strikes on Iran has led to the closure of airspace.—*PTI*

Mexico grants visas to some Iraqi players for WC

MEXICO CITY, 11 MARCH

Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has begun granting visas to players from Iraq's national team ahead of the World Cup intercontinental qualifier scheduled 31 March in Monterrey. The Iraqi team is facing logistical challenges due to disruptions caused by the war in Iran. "On 8 March, some players were processed at the Mexican Embassy in Saudi Arabia, and tomorrow other people are scheduled to be processed at the Embassy in Qatar," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported in a statement on Tuesday. The government did not specify the names of, or the number of, players granted visas.—*PTI*

Most of Iranian women's soccer team leaves Australia

GOLD COAST, 11 MARCH

The Iranian women's soccer team left Australia minus seven of its members, after tearful protests of their departure outside Sydney Airport and frantic final efforts inside the terminal by Australian officials who sought to ensure the women understood they were being offered asylum. As the team's flight time approached and they passed through security late Tuesday, each woman was taken aside to meet privately with officials, who, through interpreters, explained that they could choose not to return to Iran. Seven other women earlier accepted humanitarian visas, allowing them to remain permanently in Australia.—*PTI*

-PTI

GG appoint Sehrawat as head coach ahead of PKL

AHMEDABAD, 11 MARCH

Former India international Randhir Singh Sehrawat has been appointed as the head coach of Gujarat Giants ahead of the upcoming season of the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL). Sehrawat brings 11 seasons of PKL experience, including one title and six play-off appearances. An Arjuna Award recipient, Sehrawat has guided Indian Railways to multiple national titles and was a member of India's gold-medal-winning team at the 1990 Asian Games.Sehrawat is one of the most experienced coaches in the league, having been associated with the PKL since its launch in 2014.—*PTI*

IPL FIRST PHASE

Schedule amid travel concerns caused by war

Defending champions RCB will take on SRH in the IPL 2026 opener

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

Defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru will take on Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL 2026 opener in Bengaluru on 28 March, as the BCCI announced the first phase of IPL 2026 schedule amid concerns around players' travel arrangements due to the ongoing West Asia conflict

All matches scheduled at the Chinnaswamy Stadium remain subject to clearance from the Karnataka government-appointed expert committee, which is scheduled to meet on March 13 to assess venue preparedness in the wake of the deadly stampede at the stadium last season.

The BCCI announced the schedule of the first 20 games on Wednesday and will unveil the full schedule once the dates of elections in three states, Tamil Nadu, Assam and West Bengal, are announced.

Besides the state elections, the escalating conflict in West Asia will also be at the forefront of BCCI officials' minds. The war has wreaked havoc on international travel, with operations of major airports like Doha and Dubai being heavily restricted.

As a result of that, some of the squad members of South Africa and the West Indies are yet to reach home a week after the completion of their T20 World Cup campaign.

It remains to be seen if IPL-bound players of those two nations report to their respective teams in time.

M.No.	Date	Day	Match (Home vs. Away)
1	28/03/26	Sat	R. C. Bengaluru vs. Sunrisers Hyderabad
2	29/03/26	Sun	Mumbai Indians vs. Kolkata Knight Riders
3	30/03/26	Mon	Rajasthan Royals vs. Chennai Super Kings
4	31/03/26	Tue	Punjab Kings vs. Gujarat Titans
5	01/04/26	Wed	Lucknow Super Giants vs. Delhi Capitals
6	02/04/26	Thu	K K Riders vs. Sunrisers Hyderabad
7	03/04/26	Fri	Chennai Super Kings vs. Punjab Kings
8	04/04/26	Sat	Delhi Capitals vs. Mumbai Indians
9	04/04/26	Sat	Gujarat Titans vs. Rajasthan Royals
10	05/04/26	Sun	S. Hyderabad vs. Lucknow Super Giants
11	05/04/26	Sun	R. C. Bengaluru vs. Chennai Super Kings
12	06/04/26	Mon	Kolkata Knight Riders vs. Punjab Kings
13	07/04/26	Tue	Rajasthan Royals vs. Mumbai Indians
14	08/04/26	Wed	Delhi Capitals vs. Gujarat Titans
15	09/04/26	Thu	K K Riders vs. Lucknow Super Giants
16	10/04/26	Fri	Rajasthan Royals vs. R. C. Bengaluru
17	11/04/26	Sat	Punjab Kings vs. Sunrisers Hyderabad
18	11/04/26	Sat	Chennai Super Kings vs. Delhi Capitals
19	12/04/26	Sun	Lucknow Super Giants vs. Gujarat Titans
20	12/04/26	Sun	Mumbai Indians vs. R. C. Bengaluru

"There was a substantial delay in the departure of West Indies and South Africa players. It would be a tough task to get them back to India on time. Plus, the airfares have gone up substantially due to the war in West Asia," a team official told PTI.

The second game of the opening weekend will see the Mumbai Indians host the Kolkata Knight Riders at the Wankhede Stadium, and the opening weekend will not feature any double-headers.

"During the season, Royal Challengers Bengaluru will play five home matches in Bengaluru and two in Raipur. Punjab Kings will play four home matches in New Chandigarh and three in Dharamshala, while Rajasthan Royals will play three home matches in Guwahati and four in Jaipur," said the BCCI in a statement.

"During this period (the first 16 days), the tournament will feature four double-headers, with the afternoon matches beginning at 03:30 PM IST and the evening matches commencing at 07:30 PM IST.

"Following the opening encounter on Saturday, the Mumbai Indians will take on the Kolkata Knight Riders at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Sunday," the BCCI added. —*PTI*

INDIAN WELLS 2026

Sinner enters quarterfinals after beating Fonseca

INDIAN WELLS, 11 MARCH

Four-time major champion Jannik Sinner edged talented Brazilian teenager Joao Fonseca 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/4) in a scintillating Stadium Court clash on Tuesday night to reach the quarterfinals at Indian Wells.

The first meeting between the World No. 2 Sinner and the big-hitting 19-year-old lived up to expectations, the fireworks sparking a raucous response from a crowd packed with enthusiastic Brazilian fans. Sinner will face another fast-rising youngster in 20-year-old Learner Tien of the United States for a place in the semifinals. Fonseca went toe-to-toe with the Italian in a tense first set but was unable to convert his lone break chance, and Sinner failed to capitalise on two.A couple of uncharacteristic Sinner errors helped Fonseca power to a 6-3 lead in the tiebreaker, but the Italian responded, denying one set point with an ace to launch a run of five straight points that sealed the set.

Sinner looked headed to a comfortable victory with a 4-2 lead in the second, but Fonseca wasn't about to go quietly.

Bhambri-Goransson pair reaches Indian Wells quarterfinals

India's top doubles player Yuki Bhambri and his partner Goran Goransson advanced to the quarterfinals of the men's doubles event at the Indian Wells Masters after registering a straight-set win over the pair of Sander Arends and Jiri Lehecka.

Bhambri and Goransson produced a solid performance to defeat Arends and Lehecka 6-4, 6-4 in the pre-quarterfinal clash that lasted one hour and 14 minutes. They did not face any break point in the match and broke their rivals twice.

The Indo-Swedish pair maintained control through most of the match, securing a crucial break in each set to seal the contest in straight sets. —*PTI*

Jasmine takes lead in 5th Leg of Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour

GURUGRAM,, 11 MARCH

Jasmine Shekar –*PTI*

Jasmine Shekar stole the thunder with a two-under 70 to take a one-shot lead over promising amateur Lavanya Gupta (71) in the opening round of the fifth leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour here on Wednesday.

Mannat Brar, who turned in some fine performances late last season, was sole third with even par 72, as only three players shot par or better on the opening day at the challenging Gary Player layout of the DLF Golf & Country Club. The record field of 57 players with 49 professionals, which is playing for a whopping Rs. 18 lakh purse, saw some young names hold their own as Vidhatri Urs, Lavanya Jadon and Jahnavi Prakhya carded 2-over 74.

Jasmine, who won the first leg of the 2026 season, began very steadily with four pars and a birdie on Par-3 fifth and added four more pars to make a turn in a bogey-free 1-under.

On the back nine, she birdied the 11th to go 2-under. She bogeyed for the first time in the day on the 14th but got that shot back immediately on the 15th, only to give it away again on the 16th.

A closing birdie on the 18th ensured Jasmine was 2-under for the day.Amateur Lavanya showed why she is so highly touted as she was three under through 12 holes.

She birdied the fifth, 10th and the 12th. Four more pars followed, and she was 3-under through 16 holes. She, however, closed bogey-bogey to drop to 71.

Mannat had two birdies against one bogey on the front nine and then had two bogeys and a closing birdie on the 18th on the back nine.Two leading names, Amandeep Drall (75) and Saanvi Somu (75), were tied 7th with Khushi Khanijau, Anvvi Dahhiya, Nayanika Sanga. —*PTI*

NAHID RANA TAKES FIVE

Bangladesh thrash Pakistan by eight wickets in 1st ODI

DHAKA, 11 MARCH

Fast bowler Nahid Rana grabbed a maiden five-wicket haul as Bangladesh reduced Pakistan to a new low in white-ball cricket with a dominant eight-wicket win in the first ODI on Wednesday.

Rana picked up 5-24, and captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz took 3-29 through his off-spin, as Pakistan was blown away for 114 all-out in 30.4 overs.

It was Pakistan's lowest-ever ODI score against Bangladesh, eclipsing the previous mark of 161 during a 62-run loss at the 1999 World Cup.

Recalled opener Tanzid Hasan, preferred over Soumya Sarkar, galloped Bangladesh to 115-2 in only 15.1 overs with a blazing unbeaten 67 off 42 balls. Four Pakistan batters couldn't make a mark on their ODI debuts after the team decided to leave out Saim Ayub and Babar Azam for the series after a disappointing T20 World Cup. Bangladesh 115 for 2 (Tanzid 67*) beat Pakistan 114 (Faheem 37, Farhan 27, Rana 5-24, Mehidy 3-29). —*PTI*

TN CLINCHES C.K. NAYUDU TROPHY

CHENNAI, 11 MARCH

Tamil Nadu clinched its maiden Col. C.K. Nayudu Trophy title, chasing down 66 to beat Maharashtra by seven wickets on the third day of the final at the NPR College Cricket Ground here on Wednesday.

In doing so, it completed a double, having already lifted the BCCI men's U-23 State-A (One-Day) Trophy this season.

Earlier in the day, Kiran

Karthikeyan's influence continued after his innings. Having been the last man out for 86 (207b, 9x4) in Tamil Nadu's 334, which secured a first-innings lead of 96. —*PTI*

TOTTENHAM HAS LOST SIX CONSECUTIVE GAMES

MADRID, 11 MARCH

Beleaguered Tottenham manager Igor Tudor acknowledged "everything is going wrong" after his team slumped to a sixth straight loss for the first time in its nearly 144-year history.

A 5-2 defeat at Atletico Madrid in the first leg of the Champions League's round of 16 on Tuesday was a new low in a woeful season for Tottenham, which is only one point above the relegation zone in the Premier League.

Tudor took over on Feb. 14 as the replacement for the fired Thomas Frank and has overseen four losses in a row, failing in his task to rebuild confidence among Tottenham's players. —*PTI*

Donald Trump welcomes Iran in FIFA World Cup 2026: Gianni

MIAMI, 11 MARCH

FIFA said Tuesday night that it anticipates Iran's national team will be allowed to travel to the United States, even amid war between the countries, and compete in the World Cup that begins in about three months.

Iran is scheduled to play in Inglewood, California, against New Zealand on June 15 and Belgium on June 21 before finishing group play against Egypt in Seattle on June 26. The U.S. is hosting the tournament with Canada and Mexico from June 11 to July 19.

Iranian officials have recently suggested that the country's participation is in some doubt because of the war.

Last week, U.S. President Donald Trump said, "I really don't care" if Iran takes part in the 48-nation tournament.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino said he met with Trump on Tuesday night "to discuss the status of preparations" for the tournament and received assurances that Iran would be permitted to come to the US "We also spoke about the current situation in Iran, and the fact that the Iranian team has qualified to participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026," Infantino said in an Instagram post. "During the discussions, President Trump reiterated that the Iranian team is, of course, welcome to compete in the tournament in the United States." Infantino has a close relationship with Trump, who was awarded FIFA's inaugural peace prize an award many believe the soccer governing body created with Trump in mind. —*PTI*

DISCUSS A FRAMEWORK

Mandaviya leads push for F1 revival in India

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

Taking another step in his push to revive Formula One in the country, Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya met with the Federation of Motor Sports Clubs of India (FMSCI) to discuss a framework to create a "strong pipeline" of drivers and technicians.

The meeting was held in the national capital recently. It was also attended by sports secretary Hari Ranjan Rao, joint secretary (sports) Kunal, and FMSCI council member Vicky Chandhok, among others.

Mandaviya visited the Buddh International Circuit

in Greater Noida, which hosted F1 races from 2011 to 2013 before taxation issues led to an abrupt end to the event. "We discussed and looked at the possibility of bringing Formula One and MotoGP to India. The ministry is very keen and very clear that since India is the most advanced country in technology, the best sport should come here," Chandhok, who was at the helm of FMSCI when the races were last held, told PTI.

"They wanted to understand the challenges, and they wanted to speak to FMSCI and see our organising skills. The minister and the entire ministry are very happy to support us," he added. That Mandaviya is keen to revive the race was evident when he met officials from the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority to discuss the future of motorsports infrastructure in the country during his visit to the circuit a few weeks ago. —*PTI*

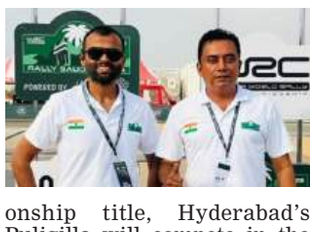
Puligilla and Sherif target WRC3 podium

NAIVASHA, 11 MARCH

Ace Indian rally driver Naveen Puligilla and co-driver Musa Sherif are gearing up for their toughest challenge as they aim to repeat their WRC3 podium finish in the third round of the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC), the iconic WRC Safari Rally Kenya 2026.

The celebrated duo, who secured a podium in their class at the WRC Rally Saudi Arabia last November, will tackle the rough terrains around Naivasha for a third consecutive time when the demanding African event runs from March 12 to 15.

Fresh from his victory at the Nashik rally that secured him the 3T class National champi-



onship title, Hyderabad's Puligilla will compete in the WRC3 category driving a Ford Fiesta Rally3 prepared and serviced by Africa Eco Sports Nairobi.

Seasoned navigator Sherif, from Kasargod with over 33 years of rally experience, will handle pace notes for the Indian driver. The pair made history in 2025, becoming the first Indian duo to secure a podium finish in any WRC class. —*PTI*